

Patterns of Wartime Sexual Violence

Perspectives from Colombia

Lisa Govasli Nilsen



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Abstract

Sexual violence has been perpetrated as a strategy or practice in a number of conflicts across the globe, but research has found that the prevalence and practice of wartime sexual violence varies greatly between different conflicts, and between different armed actors within the same war (Cohen, Green, & Wood, 2013; Cohen & Nordås, 2014; Wood, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012).

The purpose of this project was to map out patterns of wartime sexual violence in the ongoing internal conflict in Colombia, in order to contribute to an emerging literature on the variation of wartime sexual violence at the conflict level. This task was taken on with an inductive starting point in which analytical categories were obtained from the empirical material, in dialogue with existing theory. Patterns were operationalized through focusing on three interrelated factors: the contexts in which sexual violence was perpetrated during warfare; the motivation of the perpetrators of this violence; and claimed and obtained identities of its victims. The analysis uncovered three main functions of sexual violence in Colombia: to extract information and intelligence, to secure and exert territorial control, and to control armed group behavior. The term *functions* was found suitable to label these categories, as it enables us to comprehend that the results of wartime sexual violence might be both the purpose, but also the consequence of the act. This finding warns us that the propensity within scholarly and advocacy literature for framing wartime sexual violence within the ‘weapon of war’ framework, runs the risk of limiting our understanding of this complex phenomenon.

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Lisa Govasli Nilsen
Oslo, May 2014

Acronyms and Translations

Abbreviations

AUC – Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia

DDR – Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration

ELN – Ejército de Liberación Nacional, The National Liberation Army

FARC – Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia

M-19 - El Movimiento 19 de Abril, 19th of April Movement

Translations

Campesino/Campesina – Male/female peasant.

Guerrillero/Guerrillera – Male/female guerilla soldier

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1 INTRODUCTION

Wartime sexual violence has most likely existed as long as there have been wars, but it continues to be one of the least understood aspects of modern conflict (Skjelsbaek, 2001). Earlier, sexual abuse was often written off as a “side-effect” of conflict, which to a large extent was inevitable, given the nature of war (Seifert, 1996). In later years, however, a move towards understanding wartime sexual violence as a political act, and at times even as a war strategy, has been palpable, and recent research has been aimed at increasing the knowledge base on this underreported and complex phenomenon.

A significant finding in contemporary literature is the extensive variation that exists in terms of frequency and perpetration patterns of sexual violence between different conflicts across the globe, as well as within conflicts spatially or over time (Cohen, 2013; Cohen et al., 2013; Cohen & Nordås, 2014; Leiby, 2009; Wood, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012). Initially, high rates of systematic and mechanistic rape, as was seen in Bosnia or Rwanda, were understood as the typical pattern of wartime sexual violence, but recent research suggests that reality is much more nuanced and that cases such as Rwanda or Bosnia might actually represent the extreme end of a wide spectrum of cases of sexual violence in conflict (Wood, 2009). A central puzzle today is thus to explain this variation at the micro-level, attempting to map out not only why the prevalence of sexual violence vary, but also why different practices of wartime sexual violence occur across conflicts and even between groups within the same conflict (Cohen, 2013; Kirby, 2013; Wood, 2009). An important part of this work is also conceptualizing about wartime sexual violence which does not necessarily fit neatly within the ‘weapon of war’ paradigm (Baaz & Stern, 2008, 2013; Buss, 2009; Kirby, 2013).

This thesis is aimed at contributing to this debate, through qualitatively assessing patterns of wartime sexual violence in a conflict which finds itself at the moderate to low level of the prevalence scale, the internal conflict in Colombia. Cohen et al. (2013) assert that case studies and comparative studies on the armed group level of one conflict is particularly suitable for mapping out the trajectories of wartime sexual

violence, as these research designs enable us to explore the complex realities of this phenomenon at the micro-level (p. 3).

1.1 Research Questions

In line with current research, the intention with this project was to study the variation in perpetration of sexual violence within one conflict, in an attempt to map out how these acts may be categorized and understood. This work was guided by the following research questions:

What are the main patterns of wartime sexual violence in the conflict in Colombia, and why are the actors opting for this type of violence? Which perspectives emerge from the available empirical material?

The research questions was answered through a case study in which documentation and testimonies of sexual violence perpetrated by the Colombian state army, the insurgent groups FARC¹ and ELN², and paramilitary structures, including the AUC³, were considered. In addition, the insurgent group M-19⁴ was also considered, not as potential perpetrators of sexual violence, as there exists no clear evidence that this group perpetrated sexual violence, but rather in the analysis of armed actors as victims. These groups were all included in the study as they represent different factions in the Colombian conflict, including the legal armed actor – the army, as well as two strands of illegal armed actors – the leftist insurgent groups and the right-wing paramilitary structures. Furthermore, the research question was operationalized through asking sub-questions such as ‘Who are the perpetrators?’, ‘Who are the victims?’, and ‘In which contexts are sexual violence perpetrated?’ in order to map out potential patterns of perpetration. In the search for patterns, specific attention was given to the meanings and functions of sexual violence in the Colombian conflict. The focus of the study was

¹ Las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia

² Ejército de Liberación Nacional, The National Liberation Army

³ Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia

⁴ El Movimiento 19 de Abril, 19th of April Movement

on available perspectives, and framed within a discussion of partly conflicting understandings of these acts.

1.2 Case Selection

Much research on wartime sexual violence has been focused on cases of widespread wartime rape such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, and the previous Yugoslavia. In a recent book, however, Baaz and Stern (2013) argue that this focus is problematic, because it creates a sense of ‘Othering’ in which wartime sexual violence is framed as a problem of these conflicts specifically, or of African conflicts in particular (p. 25). Literature on wartime sexual violence based on cases from other parts of the world, Latin America in particular, is still limited, and there is a call to conduct more case studies drawing on experience from Latin-American countries (Green, 2004; Leiby, 2009). Furthermore, there is also a need to analyze cases which do not represent the high end of the prevalence spectrum in order to increase our understanding of the perpetration of sexual violence, also in these contexts where such acts are not endemic. Compared to for instance the DRC, Colombia appears to represent the lower to moderate end of the frequency spectrum, even though it has high prevalence of other human rights’ abuses (Cohen & Nordås, 2014, p. 424; Quijano & Kelly, 2012, p. 438).

Violence against civilians has been a central part of the Colombian civil conflict throughout its duration. Communities have often found themselves at the frontlines of the different armed groups, resulting in them becoming direct or collateral targets of violence (Amnesty International, 2011, p. 11). Additionally, armed actors in Colombia have often been targeted with violence which falls outside conventional warfare. Several reports published over the last decade have thoroughly documented the perpetration of sexual violence in the context of the conflict, including rape, forced prostitution, forced sterilization, forced abortion, and forced nakedness (Amnesty International, 2004; Coomaraswamy, 2002; Oxfam, 2009; Sanchez, Vivas, Cardenas, & Cano, 2011; United Nations Secretary General, 2013). In the court ruling Auto 092 from 2008, the Colombian Constitutional Court established that sexual violence is

widespread and systematic in the conflict and that all armed groups have employed sexual violence (Corte Constitucional de Colombia [Colombian Constitutional Court], 2008)⁵.

What has been questioned in the Colombian context, however, is the uniformity with which the different groups to the conflict employ strategies and practices of sexual violence (Amnesty International, 2004). Even though most parties to the conflict perpetrate some sexual violence, their motivations to do so, as well as the practices they employ, appear to differ. Also for this reason, Colombia represents an interesting case for scrutiny.

One important aspect that needs to be mentioned before going into a discussion of the conflict in Colombia is, however, the issue of regionalism. The conflict has clear differences in terms of conflict dynamics depending on the region. The armed groups have different dynamics and presences in the different regions, and some therefore argue that it is problematic to speak of tendencies in the Colombian conflict at a national level. As other researchers have done before, however, this thesis still attempts to keep a national perspective. This is done in accordance with for instance Safford and Palacios who argue that: “..political violence is best understood as a galaxy of social conflicts, in which each case acquires its full significance in a history of local and provincial contexts, which may be unique. But these local conflicts, with all their regional particularities, nonetheless occurred within a shared national political history” (Safford & Palacios, 2002, p. 346).

Having placed the research question within existing literature, and briefly discussed the case under scrutiny, this chapter will continue with a definition of key concepts and a short discussion of scope and limitations of the project, before we conclude with a brief outline of the thesis.

⁵ Retrieved April 30th 2014, from: <http://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/relatoria/autos/2008/a092-08.htm>

1.3 Definition of Key Concepts

Defining the main concepts is central in all research, but particularly so within research on sexual violence, as what is considered sexual violence varies greatly between different cultures, regions, and social groups (Leiby, 2012, p. 23). For the purpose of this thesis, the United Nations' definition is employed, in which sexual violence is defined as “*..rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity*” (United Nations Secretary General, 2013). This definition is the standard conceptualization of sexual violence among academics and advocates. The definition is useful as it captures the variation that exists within the umbrella expression ‘sexual violence’. “Other forms of sexual violence of comparable gravity” might for instance include sexual torture and forced nudity (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 2; Leiby, 2009; Skjelsbaek, 2001). Some of the research on wartime sexual violence is focused on wartime rape specifically, but for the purpose of this thesis it was found useful to employ the wider definition of the term, as wartime sexual violence in the conflict in Colombia appears to encompass a wider set of acts, including, but not exclusive to, wartime rape.

Defining what we understand to be wartime is also important, particularly with regards to the case under scrutiny, as Colombia has been in a lengthy conflict, which arguably has caused a merging of private and public zones, not least with regards to violence. One of the central problems when analyzing wartime sexual violence is drawing the line between when the incidents of violence may be classified as wartime and when it cannot. This line is contested, and presenting sexual violence as one or the other often has clear political implications and purposes, whether the aim is to downplay the importance of this type of violence, or to emphasize it. For the purpose of this thesis, a wide understanding of the term ‘wartime’ is employed. *Wartime* sexual violence is therefore understood as sexual violence perpetrated in the context of an armed conflict, either as a direct part of warfare or as a mechanism of the conflict in another form (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 2). Finally, wartime sexual violence can be categorized as a

weapon of war if it is “..used as part of a systematic political campaign which has strategic military purposes” (Skjelsbaek, 2001, p. 213).

1.4 Scope and Limitations

We continue to know very little about the realities of sexual violence in a number of past and present wars (Skjelsbaek, 2011). The stigma and politicization of the issue has created a situation in which underreporting is believed to be significant, and where access to reliable data is scarce. It is therefore significant at the onset of this thesis to have a short discussion of the limitations of this work, and to be open not only about what we know, but also about what we do not know.

As elsewhere, under-reporting of sexual violence is a problem in Colombia. Stigma, shame or fear of reprisal may hinder victims from reporting. Additionally, institutional errors, such as the lack of recording of incidences may further impede the availability of data (Leiby, 2009, p. 451). A common problem in the recording of human rights abuses is that they are excluded in favor of “more serious” atrocities, such as disappearances or homicide (Leiby, 2009, p. 451). This also appears to have happened in Colombia.

In part due to the limited information available, there are currently conflicting views of the use and meaning of sexual violence in the conflict in Colombia. This was reflected in interviews, as well as during the work with testimonies and reports. Whenever conflicting views were present, this will be discussed in the empirical and analytical sections of the thesis. Furthermore, the available information about the perpetration of sexual violence in Colombia is asymmetrical in the sense that there exist quite a wide range of documentation of atrocities committed by the paramilitary structures, as these groups’ official demobilization enabled the collection of testimonies both from previous combatants and from victims, who could feel safer reporting violations once the groups had demobilized. Available documentation about atrocities committed by state forces or leftist insurgent groups, particularly those still in existence today, are limited in comparison, but still exist. Because of these limitations, the scope of this

thesis is hence to map out the patterns that are evident *in available empirical material*. Given that the aim of the project was to map out patterns of perpetration, without saying anything about the relative frequency of these patterns, the available material was found to be adequate to answer the research question.

1.5 Thesis Outline

This section will be concluded with a brief outline of the coming chapters. Chapter 2 will give an introduction to the methodological considerations forming the basis of the analysis. In chapter 3, a brief literature review of important developments in the research on wartime sexual violence will be given, before a more in-depth discussion of the theoretical framework employed for the analysis, will be presented. Chapter 4 provides background information on the conflict in Colombia, as well as on the actors considered in the analysis. In chapter 5, the empirical material is presented through a discussion of the contexts in which sexual violence happens in Colombia, its perpetrators, and its victims. In chapter 6, the analysis of the empirical material will be presented in a dialogue with the theoretical framework. Finally, chapter 7 provides concluding remarks, as well as some reflections on relevant topics for future research.

2 METHODS

Wartime sexual violence is still a fairly new area of study within the discipline of political science. At this point, the theoretical evidence that exist is based mostly on empirical findings and further research is needed in order to improve the knowledge base on this complex phenomenon. For this reason, I found it suitable to have an inductive point of departure for my research. As opposed to deductive research, which will take existing theory as its clear starting point, inductive analysis seeks out categories and the analytical framework within the data at hand (Rossmann & Rallis, 2012, p. 276). This must clearly be done, however, with a strong and continuous interaction with existing conceptual framework.

The causes of wartime sexual violence appear to be extensive and deep-rooted. With the research design at hand, in which the case under scrutiny is a conflict still ongoing, with a peace process underway which might shape the type and depth of information available, I did not see it as my main task to map out the causal mechanisms explaining the prevalence of sexual violence in Colombia. Rather my focus was on diverging perspectives – how different actors directly or indirectly involved in the Colombian conflict understood the incidences of sexual violence. Through this, my intention was to shed light on how atrocities committed in Colombia are understood in the local context and how this can be linked to more general findings in the literature.

This approach diverges somewhat from the positivist search for causal explanations for social phenomena. Kirby (2013) warns against the propensity within positivist social science for seeking out ‘explanations’ for the phenomenon under scrutiny, linking empirical findings with theoretical claims to coherently explain a phenomenon. Such attempts will very rarely succeed at actually ‘explaining’ the phenomenon at hand, as social phenomena are often far more complex than reductionist ‘explanations’ can entail. Instead Kirby suggests that social phenomena should be studied aided by what he calls *modes*, which “are packages of explanations united by common themes and assumptions, differentiated from other modes by the distinctive way in which they assemble and cohere accounts of the social world” (Kirby, 2013, p. 802). Such modes

have similarities with the analytical tool *ideal types*, which was employed when organizing the empirical material analyzed for this thesis. The ideal type is the invention of Max Weber who asserts that: “[a]n ideal type is formed by the one-sided **accentuation** of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified **analytical** construct” (Weber, 1949, p. 90, original emphasis). An ideal type is in other words a tool for making sense of social phenomena which might have numerous causes, meanings, or motives. This means that an ideal type does not represent a ‘correct’ representation of reality, as the creation of ideal types always involves emphasizing certain aspects of the complex social phenomenon under study, but it is a valuable tool for increasing our analytical understanding of this social phenomenon.

2.1 Research Design - The Case Study

A qualitative case study was found to be best suited to answer the research question. According to George and Bennett (2004) a case study is a “*detailed examination of an aspect of a historical episode to develop or test historical explanations that may be generalizable to other events*” (p. 5). The benefits of case study research is that it enables the researcher to use multiple methods for data collection while going into detail about the case under scrutiny, including the complexity of variables, in order to develop thick concepts concerning the topic under study (Rossmann & Rallis, 2012, pp. 103-104). Due to the relatively early stage that conceptualizing about wartime sexual violence finds itself, in addition to the limited and partly conflicting data in the case under scrutiny, this research design was deemed to be the best suited for the purpose of this thesis, as it enabled the exploration of the complexity of the variables under study.

There are several sub-categories of case studies, depending on the research objective. This study is located within the category which George and Bennett (2004) calls “‘Building Block’ studies” (p. 76). These are studies which “*identify common patterns*

or serve a particular kind of heuristic purpose” (George & Bennett, 2004, p. 76).

Within this logic, research is seen as a cumulative process, in which blocks or subtypes studied ideally should function to inform a larger theory or typology. For the purpose of this thesis, this means that the overall class of the phenomenon of interest is sexual violence in war, but that the subclass of this phenomenon – the ‘block’ under scrutiny - is sexual violence used in different patterns of the civil war in Colombia.

2.1.1 Benefits and Limitations of the Research Design

As the first paragraph of section 2.1 illustrates, case study research generally scores high on internal and conceptual validity, due to the depth of the study and the possibilities it creates for drawing on several different data sources. A common criticism of case study research is, however, the apparent lack of generalizability that these methods offer. To counter this criticism many qualitative researchers has included some aspects of quantitative research methods in their data collection and analysis, in an attempt to reach a higher level of generalizability. Other scholars have criticized this approach, however, for “watering out” the strengths of the qualitative approach such as a high internal validity and a thick conceptualization. Small, for instance, criticizes the propensity to expect that interview studies with small numbers of respondents should represent larger entities (Small, 2009, pp. 9-10). He argues instead for a different approach to evaluate qualitative studies in which the central strength of this method is the extent to which an interviewee’s narrative informs the analysis (Small, 2009, p. 8). In this project I am uneager to speak of a ‘typicality’ of the case under study. As my informants were localized in Bogotá only, including only a limited number of individuals who were actually willing to be interviewed, I am reluctant to speak of generalizability. When doing in-depth studies, there is no way to determine whether an analysis of the entire population, say for instance of all victims of sexual violence, of all guerilla or paramilitary combatants in the Colombian conflict, or even of all professionals working with wartime sexual violence in the country, would yield similar results as the ones I obtained from my analysis of a very limited subset of these groups, in addition to mainly second-hand accounts.

At the same time, however, there are techniques for the qualitative researcher to ensure that she has saturated the material at hand as much as possible. This is also linked to the question of when one has gathered ‘enough’ data. Quantitative research designs usually have clear parameters for how many tests a sample should contain. In qualitative research this is not necessarily as clear, but there are techniques for determining whether you have compiled ‘enough’ data. A technique known as sequential interviewing and analysis implies treating each interview as a “test” of its own, with the result that in the end new interviews will not present significant new results (Small, 2009, pp. 24-26). Every interview is refined in order to test the hypothesis theoretically or literally with the aim of attaining saturation (Small, 2009, pp. 26-27). As will be discussed in further detail in section 2.2, a similar method was employed during my interviewing, as well as during the desk study. With the short time frame of the study, however, reaching saturation in its purest form was not possible, but a ‘light-version’ was obtained, in terms of the informants and documents repeating similar aspects and insights.

Another criticism which often meets qualitative case studies is that they are constantly sampling on the dependent variable (Small, 2009, p. 9). In research on wartime sexual violence this would entail constantly choosing cases with high levels of sexual violence, a sampling method which clearly runs the risk of creating biased results. Given that this study is treated as a ‘building block study’, which together with other similar studies aims at informing larger theories on wartime sexual violence, the case under scrutiny does not represent the high end of the prevalence spectrum, but rather is situated at the low-moderate end, as outlined in chapter 1. Furthermore, the variation within the case, with different strands of armed actors: one legal actor⁶ and two different strands of illegal actors⁷, which all have shown differing patterns of perpetration of sexual violence, enable us to qualitatively explore variation within one case.

⁶ The Colombian army

⁷ Paramilitary structures and leftist insurgent groups

Finally, a last measure to evaluate the quality of a study is reliability, in other words whether a study is replicable. Reliability is a difficult question with regards to interview studies due to the contextual factors affecting data availability and interpretation, such as the situations in which interviews are conducted and the reflexivity of the researcher herself. George and Bennett (2004) assert, however, that a central means for increasing a qualitative study's reliability is transparency, in other words reporting how data were obtained (p. 106). As far as possible, this study attempts to be transparent about data sources, including how and where data were obtained, and which potential biases different sources might have. At the same time, however, research involves certain trade-offs. One such trade-off might for instance be between transparency on the one hand, and securing the anonymity of the informants of the other. This specific trade-off will be discussed in further detail in the section on qualitative interviewing below.

2.2 Methods of Data Collection: Qualitative Interviewing and Desk Study

The main method for data collection was field work, which was conducted for one month in January and February 2014, in Bogotá, the capital of Colombia. Bogotá was found to be a suitable starting point for data collection, as most organizations, both local and international, which are working with different issues connected to human rights violations and gender issues are based in Bogotá. Additionally, several of the larger DDR-projects⁸ are also based there.

2.2.1 Qualitative interviewing

As discussed above, the focus of the study was to gain insight into central actors' understanding of the use of wartime sexual violence in Colombia. Central actors in this context included demobilized combatants, members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society, as well as staff of relevant intergovernmental

⁸ Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of armed actors

organizations (IGOs). The interviews did hence primarily, though not exclusively, focus on collecting second-hand accounts from professionals in the field.

With the exception of one informant⁹, who gave information through a personal conversation, the interviews with all actors were conducted as semi-structured interviews, with open-ended questions. The interview guide worked only as guidance for conversation. This manner of interviewing was chosen in line with the inductive perspective, in order to allow informants to elaborate on the topics that were most central to them. Themes that would recur in interviews guided the analytical framework of the study, and were linked to central themes in existing conceptual and theoretical works. Furthermore, themes that would recur in early interviews would be integrated in later interviews to detect linkages between different informants' perspectives. In this sense, aspects of grounded theory were integrated in my analysis. Grounded theory in its purest form is a flexible manner of conducting research in which the entire research process is a dialogue between the raw data and the data analysis (Charmaz, 2003). In this process, a researcher starts out with some themes and topics that she finds interesting and relevant to her research question. As interviews are conducted, the researcher remains open to the possibility that these themes and topics are modified as new topics arise in interviews. The ultimate goal of the interviewer is to locate the story of each interviewee “*..within a basic social process*” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 314). For the purpose of this project, this general social process would be the perpetration of sexual violence in the internal conflict in Colombia. At the same time, however, due to time constraints, I was not able to pertain to one of the central aspects of grounded theory – repeated interviews – and did therefore not employ this approach in its purest form.

In order to increase the analytical value of my data I attempted to get as many perspectives as possible of the issue at hand. This was done through interviewing both individuals who had first-hand experience with the conflict, and individuals who worked with the topic on a professional basis. The professional informants also

⁹ Staff from Mapp-OEA

represented different perspectives, and held second-hand information on different issues according to their areas of expertise and the focal points of their work. In terms of sampling, two sampling techniques were employed. Parts of my sampling was, out of necessity, convenience-driven, following a technique similar to the one known as ‘networking’ or ‘snow-ball sampling’ (Lee, 1993, pp. 65-69; Small, 2009, p. 14). This technique simply implies that the researcher asks interviewees or gate-keepers to recommend other interviewees, and the benefit of it is that the number of informants usually increases (Small, 2009). Coming as an outsider to Colombia, with only a limited knowledge of Spanish, as well as a very limited time frame for the field work, snowballing was central in my search for interviewees. The other strategy I employed was a version of the sampling technique known as sampling for range. Sampling for range means that the researcher identifies some central sub-categories of the group one wishes to study (Small, 2009, p. 13). For the purpose of my interviewing this meant that I obtained professional informants working both with a focus on civilian victims of the armed conflict, and with a focus on the armed groups. Furthermore, professional informants were also obtained both from the governmental and non-governmental sphere.

2.2.2 Who were the informants?

The organizations interviewed were picked with the intention of speaking to a range of informants, both individuals working with the armed groups in Colombia and also individuals working with victims of the armed conflict. This distinction is significant because one might imagine that informants working with victims could have a different perspective on the issue than those working directly with armed groups. The organization Geneva Call and Mapp-OEA works directly with armed actors, whereas IMP, ILSA, Corporacion Humanas, Oxfam International, and UN Women predominantly collect their material from the victims. The representative interviewed from Norwegian Caritas did not work directly with sexual violence in the conflict, but was a political scientist with a broad knowledge base on the realities of conflict in

Colombia, including the dynamics of the different armed groups, and so this interview functioned to map out contextual issues regarding the conflict and its actors.

According to Lee (1993), the utilization of second-hand sources, such as professional informants, consists both a responsible and useful approach for researchers working with sensitive topics (pp. 73-74). Professionals working with the groups under scrutiny are valuable sources of information due to their opportunity for “*routine interaction with*” these groups, which often leaves them with a unique overview of the issue at hand (Lee, 1993, p. 73). The limitation of employing professional informants as second-hand sources can, however, be that these individuals often encounter specific sub-groups from the units under study (Lee, 1993, p. 73). In the Colombian context, this could for instance mean that organizations working with a main focus on victims of sexual violence will not necessarily collect information from armed actors, and vice versa. To counter this limitation, informants from both types of organizations were sampled, as outlined above.

Three female ex-combatants were also interviewed for the purpose of this project. They were all previous combatants from the leftist insurgent group M-19 which demobilized in the beginning of the 1990s. One of the informants had also briefly been a member of FARC for a short time period in the 1990s. Clearly these three informants do not in any way constitute a representative selection of Colombian ex-combatants, given their low number, in addition to the fact that they were all female with background only from leftist insurgent groups, and predominately from one group in particular. Their stories and perspectives have thus been treated as illustrations and examples rather than coded in order to generalize about the perspectives of previous combatants.

Additionally, and regardless of the number of informants, researchers have also warned that testimonies of demobilized combatants should be treated with caution when attempting to generalize to current combatants. In his study of illegal armed groups in Colombia, Sanín argues that it might be problematic to build a reliable generalization of what combatants are like, based on interviews of demobilized

combatants: *“After the termination of war, polling them may be possible, but their opinions, perceptions, memories, and self-characterizations may have changed critically”* (Sanín, 2008, p. 7). Similar points were also brought up by several of the informants, included the three ex-combatants that were interviewed. More specifically, informants mentioned that combatants who had demobilized through the government programs did this with an understanding that benefits would be given to them depending on how much they appeared to have suffered during their time in the armed group, and that this fact could shift the way their narratives were presented (Ex-combatants II & III, in personal interview 31.01.14; Staff from Geneva Call, in personal interview 17.01.14). Rather than being perceived as an impediment to collecting ‘truthful’ stories, however, such factors could represent interesting meta-data¹⁰. Fujii (2010) asserts that in settings of war and violence, paying attention to meta-data such as silences and invented stories is significant, because such data *“indicate how the current social and political landscape is shaping what people might say to a researcher”* (Fujii, 2010, p. 232).

It was my intention to interview a larger sample of ex-combatants, including male ex-combatants, for this project, but this turned out to be infeasible within the time frame at hand. A central part of gaining access to informants is gaining trust - for the purpose of this project; primarily that of gate-keepers at organizations or programs working with demobilized combatants. I experienced that even though much effort was spent prior to field work on negotiating access, the real work with building informant’s trust could only be started fully once in Bogotá. The three ex-combatants I interviewed were all recruited following an interview at an organization, which in turn enabled that informant to verify my identity and intentions to further gate-keepers. For male ex-combatants such an access point did not become available within the time period at hand. Another issue related to this is also that gaining access to armed groups which are currently functioning in Colombia is very difficult, both because the groups inhabit in remote areas, but also because the Colombian government forbids contact between

¹⁰ “..the spoken or unspoken expressions about people’s interior thoughts and feelings, which they do not always articulate in their stories or responses to interview questions” (Fujii, 2010, p. 232).

civilians and the illegal armed groups. This includes interviewing by organizations or scholars, and has hence led to limitations in the information that is available about realities within existing armed groups (Staff from Geneva Call, in personal interview 17.01.14).

Except for their organizational affiliation and position, informants' identities have been kept anonymous in this thesis¹¹. The sensitivity of the subject, in combination with the possibility of misunderstandings due to the use of an interpreter, led to this decision. No informants were asked about or spoke of personal experience with victimization or perpetration of sexual violence, but again due to the sensitivity of the subject, in addition to the fact that individuals were interviewed about their first-hand experience of conflict, approval of the project was obtained prior to fieldwork from NSD¹².

2.2.3 Desk Study

To control and build on the information retrieved from interviews, I also relied heavily on information from reports, both from local and international NGOs working on sexual violence in Colombia, as well as UN agencies. A number of these reports also included direct testimonies from victims of wartime sexual violence in Colombia or from previous combatants. Additionally, newspaper articles and statistics from Colombia's legal system were also important sources of information.

In general, there exist quite a wide range of information and documentation about the use of sexual violence in the conflict in Colombia, mostly, but not exclusively, based on collection of narratives and anecdotes. A set system for recording and documenting cases is lacking, however, as in most other countries, and this makes the work of quantifying the perpetration of sexual violence, as well as understanding its root causes difficult. Often, rape victims are also killed after being sexually abused, and until recently gender-based violence was not recorded when the victim had also been a victim of another type of violence (Coomaraswamy, 2002, p. 14). In general, a

¹¹ All professional informants gave their consent to the inclusion of their organizational affiliation and position.

¹² Norwegian Social Science Data Service

sentiment in Bogotá appeared to be that the focus on sexual violence in the conflict is a relatively new phenomenon in Colombia (Mentioned by Ex-combatants II & III, personal interview, 31.01.14; Staff from Oxfam, personal interview, 30.01.14; Ex-combatant I, personal interview, 21.01.14).

In 2010 a survey was done, in a first attempt to map out the prevalence of sexual violence in the context of the Colombian conflict (Sanchez et al., 2011). What the work with this survey revealed, however, was vast underreporting, and it made it clear that very many aspects of sexual violence in the context of the Colombian conflict remain uncertain or simply unknown. One of my informants explained it like this: *“We do not have the complete panorama; we cannot say that this is the number. We do say that it is an approximation to a number”* (Staff from Oxfam, personal interview, 31.01.14).

One informant also brought up that she thought that much of the existing documentation was repetitive and that there were some clear problems with utilizing some of the information available, as it tended to treat the armed groups as similar actors with similar goals and practices (Staff from Geneva Call, personal interview, 17.01.14). Additionally, typical for much of recent narratives is that they tend to present sexual violence exclusively as a weapon of war. I found this claim to be partly true when working with the desk study. Some testimonies presented in reports were so similar that they most likely were based on the same events. In some reports this could be distinguished, if the writers had specified place and date of the event, but not all reports contain this. Furthermore, reports did not necessarily always specify to which armed group the perpetrator belonged. Relying on reports that reproduce some of the same testimonies is not necessarily a problem for a project like this one, as the aim is not to quantify the incidences, but any researcher should be aware of this occurrence as it can function to present a problem as more widespread than it actually is. For this reason I compared and contrasted testimonies throughout the process in order to try to distinguish which testimonies were indeed identical.

Furthermore, informants also brought up the issue of the subjectivity of the narratives that are collected, and that the person collecting the narrative may himself or herself affect the story that is told. Regarding a testimony collected following the murder of a woman during a massacre one informant said: “ *when sexual violence is narrated, (..) it is narrated from the perspective of men. (..) when the men tell the story, the testimony of what happened to the woman who was killed by the paramilitaries (..) say that ‘they put some little sticks in her vagina’. But I went there, and when I gathered the testimonies they said they had put like a really (..)big, big piece of wood. It is interesting to see that even when it is documented, how different it can be*” (Ex-combatant II, personal interview, 31.01.14).

A challenge encountered during the desk study was also that of language. The brunt of the material produced on wartime sexual violence in Colombia is, naturally, in Spanish. With only a limited command in Spanish, this made my work with utilizing some of the documents more difficult and time-consuming. This problem was handled through focusing on key documents, which after initial study appeared to be useful or which were commonly referenced in other work.

2.3 Methodological Challenges

In addition to the methodological challenges prompted by the limitations of the research design, as was discussed in chapter 2.1, there are also potential methodological and practical problems related to researching wartime sexual violence specifically. Because sexual violence is a sensitive issue, with taboo and immense trauma connected to it, data collection is challenging. In my interviewing for first-hand accounts of the conflict, I therefore focused my questions on what informants had heard, seen, and what they knew, rather than what they themselves had *experienced*. The decision of conducting my interviews in such a manner was guided by two main considerations: First of all, I did not intend for the information retrieved to become too personal. My purpose was to shed light on how sexual violence was understood in general within a given group, and hence what the informants knew based on their

background in that group. Second of all, I saw some ethic challenges with asking people directly about their direct experiences with sexual violence.

Most of my interviews were, however, conducted with second-hand informants. When researching a sensitive topic, the use of professional informants is recommended as far as possible, as discussed in an earlier section of this chapter. The conflict in Colombia is, and continues to be, closely monitored by a number of international, national, and local NGOs, and these groups represent a significant source of information. Sandvik and Lemaitre (2013) warn that information compiled by organizations should always be treated with some care (pp. 537-538). Not because the information is not true, but rather because the organizations very often are agents themselves in the information they portray. This means that organizations are not only producing information, they are also using it actively in their own work. As when considering any information, one must always consider the informant's bias, and the bias on behalf of organizations might be related to the way in which they themselves intend to employ the material to reach certain policy goals (Sandvik & Lemaitre, 2013, pp. 537-538) .

Through my interviewing I attempted to counter this concern, by urging the staff of the organizations to be specific about the topics they are discussing in their reports, defining concepts and clarifying uncertainties. When words and phrases commonly used in academic and advocacy literature were brought up, such as “sexual violence as strategy”, “the widespread use of sexual violence”, or “sexual violence as a weapon of war”, informants were asked to clarify and reflect upon what specifically these phrases referred to in the Colombian context.

2.3.1 My Role as a Researcher and Reflections upon Working with an Interpreter

Reflecting upon one's own role as a researcher is pivotal when conducting qualitative interviewing. Being a student from abroad, with only a basic command in Spanish, I was clearly an outsider when conducting my interviews. The outsider status might be both an advantage and a drawback when conducting interviews. On the one hand,

being an outsider could be an advantage in the manner that the informant could feel more confident when sharing information with me, because he/she would know that I was not Colombian and that I was not in any manner a part to the situation in Colombia. On the other hand, however, my status as an outsider could also create uncertainty about motives for seeking the information I was asking for. Getting past gatekeepers to get access to informants is also often more challenging as an outsider. Finally, the lack of a common language might create a distance between me and the informant.

Using an interpreter for the brunt of my interviews was necessary, as most of my informants did not speak English, and my command of Spanish is too limited for me to be sure to comprehend everything in an interview situation. Language proficiency is a commonly debated topic within literature on research methods. It has been argued repeatedly that lacking language proficiency, needing to use an interpreter for research, poses clear challenges and limitations to your work. Borchgrevink (2003) argues, however, that comprehension of language is only one way in which one can understand the situation one is studying, and that a deeper understanding of the social and cultural circumstances are just as important for a researcher to understand the topics under scrutiny (pp. 107-108). Borchgrevink (2003) further asserts that the use of an interpreter might indeed in some regards be an asset for the researcher if employed correctly (pp. 111-112). He warns, however, that the characteristics of the interpreter may shape somewhat the access to information that one gets, in the same way as the researcher herself shapes what type of information is available to her. One category which might have an impact in the context of this project is the gender of the interpreter. There are, however, divided opinions on what gender-composition works best in an interview situation. Houge asserted in her master thesis, that she saw it as an advantage to employ a male interpreter when interviewing for her project on sexual violence in the war in Bosnia & Herzegovina, both because it seemed as if her (male) informant felt more comfortable with sharing his thoughts when a man was present, and also because she, as a female researcher, felt more comfortable addressing issues of sexual violence with a convicted perpetrator with a male research assistant present

(Houge, 2008, pp. 28-29). Gjelsvik (2010) argued in her thesis on the other hand, that when interviewing female ex-combatants in Colombia she experienced that it was easier for informants to open up about sensitive topics to her because she was a woman. Since there are divided opinions on which is better, I ended up focusing on finding an interpreter who was local to Bogotá and had a good command in English. Having a local interpreter can be preferable, according to Borchgrevink, as the interpreter may also appear to be a valuable source of information (Borchgrevink, 2003, p. 110). The interpreter can help guide the researcher in being sensitive to the local context and serve as an important discussion partner during the field work. This all applied to me, as my interpreter ended up being an important discussion partner following interviews, something that was valuable given that I was a rather inexperienced interviewer. Finally, I also ended up employing a female interpreter, and as far as I am concerned this was beneficial. Particularly when interviewing female ex-combatants and in conversation with women's rights and feminist organizations, I believe that the dynamics of the conversation might have been different if a man was present.

Having outlined the main methodological considerations pertaining to this study, the next chapter will introduce the theoretical framework which guided the analysis.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter the theoretical foundation which guided the analysis will be introduced. As briefly discussed in chapter 1, wartime sexual violence continues to be underreported and understudied in a number of conflicts around the globe, and there is a need for further research mapping out the trajectories and patterns of sexual violence at the micro-level. Because theories of wartime sexual violence are still at an early stage, the starting point of my analysis was exploratory and inductive, and existing theory have served as analytical guidelines. As outlined in chapter 1, the research question was operationalized through analyzing inter-connected aspects of wartime sexual violence, hereunder its perpetrators, its victims, and the context in which the atrocities are committed. Because the analysis will focus on all three aspects, the theoretical framework was designed in order to address them all, drawing on different strains of literature.

In order to study the perpetrators of sexual violence in war, and the contexts in which this violence is committed, section 3.2.1 will draw upon studies focusing on the ‘repertoire of violence’ of armed actors, and the dynamics within armed groups which might determine the ways in which sexual violence is perpetrated. An understanding of an armed group’s ‘repertoire of violence’ is useful for studying not only in which contexts violence is perpetrated, but also more specifically *what type* of violence is perpetrated in a given context. Further, section 3.2.2 will introduce different ways of conceptualizing about victims of wartime sexual violence with a particular focus on the identities that are held by and prescribed to groups that are targeted with sexual violence. Section 3.2.3 introduces the gendered understanding of war, which was introduced for two reasons. First of all, a gendered understanding of war enables us to comprehend how men and women are affected differently by atrocities committed in war. Second, it also enables us to look at how war is gendered, meaning that socially constructed masculine and feminine identities are ascribed to acts of war. Finally, the debate regarding sexual violence as a wartime strategy is introduced in section 3.2.4, in order to obtain more theoretical tools for conceptualizing about the conflicting

perspectives that emerges in attempts to outline motives and functions of sexual violence in conflict.

Before we turn to the theoretical framework, however, some central developments in the existing literature on wartime sexual violence will be discussed.

3.1 Theorizing Wartime Sexual Violence – From Essentialism to Social Constructivism, and the Study of Variation.

Initially wartime sexual violence was understood within the theoretical scope of essentialism, which assumes that rape is prevalent during war, because rape is prevalent in general (Brownmiller, 1975). Essentialism is deterministic on behalf of the masculine nature, suggesting that men will rape when given the opportunity to do so, and that conflict situations give ample opportunity, hence wartime rape is prevalent (Brownmiller, 1975). Brownmiller writes in her seminal text from 1975 that “*..rape in war reveals the male psyche in its boldest form*” (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 33).

Recent research has found, however, that the prevalence, severity, and practice of wartime sexual violence appear to vary significantly between conflicts, between different groups in the same conflict, or even within the same armed group over time (Cohen, 2013; Cohen et al., 2013; Cohen & Nordås, 2014; Leiby, 2009; Wood, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012). The recently published SVAC¹³-dataset, which has quantified wartime sexual violence globally, shows clear patterns of variation in the prevalence across different conflicts (Cohen & Nordås, 2014). Such findings cannot be accounted for in a meaningful way in a rather static theory such as essentialism. If men rape when given the opportunity to do so, how may we understand the numerous individuals, groups, or even entire conflict situations, in which sexual violence is avoided? Furthermore, essentialism is also not capable of accounting for why some groups within the conflict are targeted with sexual violence more than others (Skjelsbaek, 2001, p. 218).

¹³ Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict

To address this, wartime sexual violence was increasingly studied through the theoretical lenses of social constructivism from the 1990s onwards, in order to see how interests and identities are shaped in a social process, and hence why certain types of violence are seen as appropriate and strategic in a given context, as well as why certain groups are targeted with this violence (Skjelsbaek, 2001). Through focusing “*on the role of ideas, norms, knowledge, culture, and argument*” (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, p. 392) this approach implies understanding wartime sexual violence as “*...a socially constructed experience that (...) is therefore neither inevitable nor unchangeable*” (Turshen, 2001, p. 56). This means that we can analyze how both perpetrators and victims are ‘constructed’ in accordance with factors such as the wartime context, strategic considerations, socialization processes, and identity. Furthermore, a social constructivist approach enables us to comprehend that wartime sexual violence itself is not an essentialist entity, but rather a constructed phenomenon, which may be interpreted and understood differently according to perspective and context.

Social constructivism is not, however, a set theory which can easily be employed to study any phenomenon, but rather a starting point for further analysis, and in recent years scholarly attention has thus increasingly been directed towards mapping out and explaining differing patterns of wartime sexual violence, including perpetrators’ motivations and justifications for turning to this specific type of wartime violence. Some scholars have framed wartime rape predominantly as a tool for ethnic cleansing and as a part of genocide (Sharlach, 2000). As much as there are clear examples of this being true, most prominently in the Rwandan genocide and in the war in Bosnia, rape as genocide does not reflect the full picture of wartime sexual violence, or even of wartime rape. Research has also demonstrated that there are examples of ethnic conflicts which have low levels of sexual violence¹⁴ (Wood, 2011, p. 37).

Variation has usually been studied either with a focus on the purpose of the act or with a focus on perpetrators’ motivations for acting. Scholars have identified a number of alleged purposes of wartime sexual violence, including sexual torture of political

¹⁴ For instance the Israeli/Palestinian conflict (Wood, 2011)

prisoners, at times for the purpose of intelligence gathering; collective punishment or repression of a group; generalized terror; reproductive destruction; or as rewards to troops (Leiby, 2009, pp. 457-458; Wood, 2011, p. 57). Finally, Leiby (2009) also asserts that the perpetration of sexual violence simply can signal a loss of control (Leiby, 2009, pp. 457-458). Further, Donna Pankhurst (Referenced in Kirby, 2013, p. 800) has identified five general explanations for wartime rape, which reflects more the perpetrator's justification for acting: sexual violence can be understood as a weapon of war; it may function as a reward for combatants; it can be a consequence of social breakdown due to long term warfare; it can be linked to 'root causes' of masculinity; or it may be an expression of frustration-aggression and male trauma.

The latter explanation is supported by Baaz & Stern, who in their study of wartime sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), found that poverty and suffering appear to have functioned as "*impetus for enactments of violence*" (Baaz & Stern, 2008, p. 75). Armed forces as well as the police enjoy little legitimacy among the civil population in the DRC, and because of this soldiers report a "*..sense of deprivation, and even victimhood*" (Baaz & Stern, 2008, p. 66). When interviewed about their motivations for committing different types of violence, soldiers in the DRC explained that poverty was the indirect reason for sexual violence, both because rape became an outlet for suffering and frustration, and also because it became a means to make ends meet through interconnected practices of stealing, rape and sabotage (Baaz & Stern, 2008, pp. 75-78).

In her study of wartime sexual violence in Sierra Leone, however, Cohen (2013) found evidence for a function of sexual violence which deviates somewhat from the trajectories outlined above. In the context Cohen (2013) studied, sexual violence appeared to be a means for creating group cohesion, through forcing combatants to perpetrate sexual violence either to create a sense of 'brotherhood' among them, or to diminish their possibilities for abandoning the group by making them commit sexual violence against their own home villages, or even their own families (pp.463-466). This practice was employed, according to Cohen in order to create a cohesive fighting

unit, despite the fact that combatants did not generally have a strong, initial sense of belonging to the group, often because they had been abducted (Cohen, 2013, p. 476).

Further, scholarly literature also varies in terms of the degree to which it argues that wartime sexual violence should be understood within the cultural context of the country in which it takes place, and whether it should be understood as a continuation of peace time sexual violence. Skjelsbaek (2011) argues that the nature of war suggests that wartime sexual violence is qualitatively different from sexual violence in peacetime, asserting that “[t]he setting of war represents an extreme break with the norms and values that guide peaceful coexistence between people(s) – as illustrated by the very fact that killing is permissible under certain conditions in war according to the Geneva Convention” (Skjelsbaek, 2011, p. 77). Other scholars argue, however, that wartime rape cannot be studied in complete isolation from peacetime rape, and that the former should be seen as a continuation of the latter (Baaz & Stern, 2008; Henry, Ward, & Hirshberg, 2004; Seifert, 1996). Leiby positions herself in-between these stances by arguing that there most likely is a relationship between wartime sexual violence and a country’s pre-existing gender relations, but that one at the same time cannot explain wartime sexual violence based on gender-roles in peace-time alone (Leiby, 2009, p. 448 in footnote). This is supported by Wood who claims: “[i]n some settings, wartime sexual violence appears to magnify existing cultural practices; in others, patterns of sexual violence appear to be wartime innovations by armed groups” (Wood, 2011, p. 38). The latter links back to the quotes from Skjelsbaek above, which points us to understanding the perpetration of wartime sexual violence along the same lines as perpetration of wartime killings – it is an act for which combatants are trained and socialized: “..a perpetrator of sexual violence in war may not be a rapist with a history of offenses involving sexual violence prior to the war, and that violence may have no bearing on behavior after the war” (Skjelsbaek, 2011, p. 77).

Having outlined some important findings in existing literature, we will now turn to the theoretical framework which formed the basis for the analysis.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

Wood asserts that most of our explanations for wartime sexual violence are at best insufficient (Wood, 2009). This view is supported by Baaz & Stern, who argue that: “[a]ny framework for understanding and redressing complex problems, such as sexual violence in war, is bound to be limited and limiting” (Baaz & Stern, 2013, p. 2).

Existing theorizing has struggled with lifting the theoretical scope from a country specific focus to more general theory. The explanations for wartime sexual violence may at times appear to be almost as plentiful as the studies of the phenomenon itself, and a case-by-case focus has been a common mode of research (Kirby, 2013, p. 815).

It has become increasingly clear, however, that a mono-causal model for explaining wartime sexual violence simply is not sufficient to understand this complex phenomenon. Leiby argues “that sexual violence serves no *single* purpose during war and by focusing exclusively on the ethnic, political, *or* gender identity of the victim, previous studies have oversimplified the nature of the phenomenon” (Leiby, 2009, p. 447, original emphasis). It is therefore reasonable to assume that a more complete explanatory model needs to include more than one trajectory. For this reason this study will, as outlined in the introduction of this chapter, study wartime sexual violence in Colombia by addressing three interconnected aspects: the armed groups that perpetrate the violence, the victims, and the contexts in which these acts take place. To construct a framework in which the patterns of wartime sexual violence in Colombia can be analyzed I will therefore draw upon different strains of literature which enables us to understand and analyze varying patterns of sexual violence from different perspectives.

3.2.1 ‘The Repertoires of Violence’: The Top-Down and Bottom-Across Logics

The term *repertoire of violence*, refers to “the subset of battle deaths, assassinations, forced displacement, torture, sexual violence (various forms), et cetera, regularly observed on the part of an armed group” (Wood, 2011, p. 40). Sanín asserts that

armed groups differ in behavior due to a set of structures which have both historical, contingent, and strategic features, and which function to organize and transform combatants within the group (Sanín, 2008, p. 5). An armed group's repertoire of violence is not necessarily set, but might change with time when a group is striving to grow and survive, for instance through replicating the violence employed by one of its opponents (Sanín, 2008, p. 5; Wood, 2011, p. 40). For armed groups that have existed for a long time, like the groups in the Colombian conflict, one should hence expect these structures to have evolved since their beginning.

Wood suggests that one should focus on three categories to explain behavioral variation: The role of group leadership and hierarchy, ultimate goals and aims of the armed group, and group processes, including institutions for training, discipline, and socialization (Wood, 2009, 2011). Generally, Wood explains both the relative absence of sexual violence, and its use as a war strategy through two logics: the top-down logic and the bottom-across logic (Wood, 2011, pp. 54-58). Bottom-across is linked to norms, culture, and similar entities, whereas the top-down logic explains the ordered and strategic employment of violence.

In terms of the role of leadership and hierarchy, group leaders might, based on norms, including group ideology, or strategic assessment, see sexual violence as productive or counterproductive, acceptable or not acceptable (Wood, 2009). Some leaders might choose to accept sexual violence, without directly ordering it, whereas others might see widespread sexual violence as a potential threat to group cohesion (Wood, 2009).

Whether sexual violence is seen as productive or not, might be closely linked to a group's ultimate goals (Wood, 2009). Included in these considerations are not only the actual military strategy, but also concerns regarding legitimacy among significant supporters (Wood, 2011, p. 49). If close contact with civilian populations is seen as instrumental for the group, for instance for economic support or information, sexual violence can be deemed counter-productive (Wood, 2009).

Linked to this, it is also important to note that the repertoire of violence designated by the leadership of an armed group, might not necessarily equal the observed repertoire

of violence of that group (Wood, 2011, p. 40). This is an example of a principal-agent relationship dilemma (Leiby, 2009, p. 448). There are two main dilemmas in principal-agent relationships – goal variance and information asymmetry (Leiby, 2009, p. 448). The dilemma of goal variance refers to a situation in which the goals of the principal and the agent (i.e. the armed group leadership and the combatants) differ (Leiby, 2009, p. 448). The second dilemma refers to the leadership's limited access to information about combatant's behavior, both due to spatial separation and also due to hierarchy (Leiby, 2009, p. 448). The strength of group hierarchy will hence help explain differences between orders and actual practice (Wood, 2009). Hierarchical strength may be measured independently from the degree to which combatants perpetrate violence against civilians. Wood suggest the ability to tax civilians, the ability to internally punish unwanted behavior, and the organizational capacity to carry out complicated operations as reasonable observable measurements for group hierarchy (Wood, 2011, p. 52). With regards to perpetration of sexual violence specifically, the strength of group hierarchy may be assessed based on the degree to which messages and commands are transported from the highest to the lowest levels of the hierarchy, and the degree to which behavior is punished or rewarded (Wood, 2011, p. 52).

The question of groups' hierarchy may also tap into the question of strategy, as categorizing an act as strategic suggest that the act is part of a plan for "*defeating the enemy*", and hence that it is ordered (Baaz & Stern, 2013, p. 5). The purpose of sexual violence may, according to Wood (2011) be distinguished between strategic and opportunistic violence (p. 41). Strategic violence may in turn be differentiated between ordered atrocities and atrocities that are accepted without being ordered (Wood, 2011). Attempting to assess whether wartime sexual violence was an ordered strategy or not is often extremely challenging, as it is usually almost impossible to prove direct orders of committing sexual violence (Leiby, 2009, p. 455). Leiby (2009) argues, however, that it is possible to attempt a qualitative assessment of this: First, one may ask whether sexual violence took place under the presences of commanding officers, including in detention centers, as this clearly suggest consent on behalf of these leaders (pp. 448-449). Further, Leiby also suggests that if sexual violence occurs because there

is a lack of commanding control, one should see more violations in the field when combatants are far from commanding centrals (Leiby, 2009, p. 449). Finally, Leiby also suggests that opportunistic violence, which happens outside the control of commanding forces should not portray any patterns in terms of the identity of targeted individuals (Leiby, 2009, p. 449). The latter point could be questioned, however, since one could imagine a situation where patterns arise for instance due to the demographic or geographic profile of the area, or prejudices and views of individuals or groups of combatants, without these patterns reflecting an instrumental use of sexual violence. Furthermore, Leiby's framework is also problematic in the sense that it appears to suggest that combatants *will* commit sexual violence if there is a lack of control. This is not necessarily the case.

In those cases where combatants rather than commanders take the initiative for the sexual violence, this may also be understood as a "tactic" of war rather than a strategy, because individual combatants or units may see it as an effective tool for terror, for collective or individual punishment, or as reward (Wood, 2011, p. 57). The distinction between a strategy and a tactic is further clarified by Kirby (2013), who claims that a tactic may be understood as "*a short-term policy related to a particular circumstance*" (p. 808), whereas a strategy is "*a more sustained mode of fighting directed towards a greater goal*" (p. 808).

Finally, the analysis of group processes is significant in order to account for wartime violence, including, but not limited to, sexual violence. As stated by Goldstein: "[w]ar depends on various complex social interactions between and within groups" (Goldstein, 2001, p. 83). Training and in-group socialization processes can function to create acceptance for perpetrating violence, given certain conditions (Wood, 2009). Skjelsbaek (2011) asserts that "*..soldiers are trained to recognize and analyze in which settings certain forms of violence are legitimized*" (p. 77). For instance, this involves distinguishing between civilians and military personnel, and also regulating themselves according to accepted behavior between armed personnel (Skjelsbaek, 2011, p. 77). Group leaders may also deliberately create institutions or socialization patterns designed for avoiding or facilitating certain types of behavior, including

sexual violence, in order to create an effective unit of combatants (Wood, 2011, p. 50). This may be guided by ideology. In general, groups that employ strong disciplinary systems and have strict ideological or political regimes, will have a narrower repertoire of violence and generally not engage in sexual violence, according to Wood (2011, p. 51).

The study of group processes also links back to the issue of hierarchy which was discussed in an above paragraph. If hierarchy within the group is weak, combatants own norms may influence their personal 'repertoire of violence' (Wood, 2009). The norms and culture which recruits bring with them into an armed group is important, particularly if armed groups mobilize combatants from specific sub-groups. For example, Wood mentions how paramilitary groups often recruit from existing criminal networks (Wood, 2011, p. 49). Combatant norms are not, however, static figures, and will most likely evolve over the course of warfare (Wood, 2011, p. 52). A combination of the desensitization of combatants and the de-humanization of victims or opponents, may widen the repertoire of violence (Wood, 2011, p. 52). Blaming the enemy for atrocities committed against it, claiming for instance for oneself or others that 'they got what they deserved', might also be a result of long-term fighting (Wood, 2011, p. 52).

Sanín sums up what has been discussed above with suggesting that a combination of incentives and ideas may help us understand group behavior (Sanín, 2008, p. 6). Following Sanín's framework, one may create an understanding of wartime sexual violence based on a combined analysis which look both at the purposes of acts of sexual violence, and on the incentives or facilitators that may hinder or promote such acts. Having discussed the framework which will function to increase our understanding of the armed groups, as well as the contexts in which they perpetrate violence, we will now look at how we can study and conceptualize about victims.

3.2.2 Victims: Identities and Blurred Frontlines

Besides looking at characteristics of the armed groups, analyzing who the victims of wartime sexual violence are, may also help us assess the meaning and purposes of this violence. Traditionally warfare has been understood as fighting between armed groups, where the main targets have been other armed actors, and where the targeting of civilians has been seen as an unfortunate bi-effect of warfare without being directly related to it (Seifert, 1996, p. 38). What has increasingly become clear to scholars is, however, that the lines between civilian and military life is at best blurred. Kaldor has in her well-known distinction between “old” and “new” wars, argued that a characteristic of “new wars” is that the distinctions between war and peace, between civilians and militaries are blurred (Kaldor, 2007). One could clearly argue whether this is indeed a feature of “new” wars, but nevertheless this means that analyzing violence committed against civilians is significant for understanding contemporary warfare. Kaldor’s argument is further developed by Skjelsbaek, who argues that the battlegrounds of current conflicts are identities and that the front lines of these battle grounds are unclear (Skjelsbaek, 2011, p. 66).

The front lines are arguably particularly blurred during counterinsurgency operations. In this context, armed groups, including state armies, are sometimes unable or unwilling to differentiate between insurgents and civilians, if the two groups reside in the same areas (See for instance Leiby, 2009). This can create situations in which civilians are targeted massively, provoking high death tolls and human rights abuses, as well as internal displacement (Leiby, 2009, p. 460).

At the same time, victimization of wartime violence is far from always indiscriminate. Who the targets of wartime sexual violence are may be conceptualized distinguishing between *selective violence*, *indiscriminate violence* and *collective targeting* (Wood, 2011, p. 41). Where *selective violence* is targeted at specific individuals either as revenge or punishment, *indiscriminate violence* is the opposite. *Collective violence* targets specific social groups, such as inhabitants of specific regions or communities, ethnic groups, or political groups. For example, the UN Special Rapporteur of the

Commission on Human Rights concluded after the conflict in the former Yugoslavia that sexual violence was used in this context to harm and humiliate the entire ethnic group (Skjelsbaek, 2011, p. 69). Leiby (2009) also found clear patterns in the civil war in Peru of victimization based on social and political affiliation. She claims that “[s]exual violence was not random (..), but reserved for individuals who opposed the state” (p. 459). In Guatemala, on the other hand, Leiby found that civilian victims generally were not targeted with sexual violence due to their political identity or affiliation with a specific armed group, but rather based on their “*socioeconomic and ethnic cohort*” (Leiby, 2009, p. 462). “*...sexual violence was used to spread fear and terror throughout entire ‘communities of interest’*” (Leiby, 2009, p. 466). In Guatemala, indigenous populations were particularly often targeted with human rights abuses in general, and sexual violence in particular, but it is not possible to determine whether this is simply due to the fact that they inhabited the regions which were affected the most by the conflict, or whether it was part of an attempted genocide (Leiby, 2009, p. 462).

In her analysis, Wood (2008, 2009, 2011, 2012) mainly focuses on the targeting of civilians. She asserts, however, that her framework may also be used to analyze the targeting of other combatants with sexual violence. Leiby (2009) looks specifically at the targeting of combatants, most prominently as a means of gathering information in state-run detention centers. Armed actors may use sexual violence to gather information and intelligence, or to provoke a confession from a detainee (Leiby, 2009, p. 450). Sexualized torture may be a typical method for this (Leiby, 2009, p. 450).

Seifert (1996) asserts that arguably the purpose of war is destroying cultures, and more so than actually defeating your enemy militarily. “[A] war is usually ended when one side is willing to reverse its self-image and its collective consciousness” (Seifert, 1996, p. 39). From this perspective one may clearly comprehend why civilians are targeted with violence. Following the same lines, Seifert understands sexual violence as a means to “*destroy a nation’s culture*” (Seifert, 1996, p. 39). She also points to how rape can function to deteriorate entire communities, as women often function as the glue in the culture and in the communities. Furthermore, Seifert also draws lines to

the propensity to treat the “nation” as a feminine entity, whose “body” can be violated (Seifert, 1996, p. 39). Finally, however, Seifert argues that understanding wartime rape only as an attack on the individual, nation or community is not sufficient to understand its many faces, she also sees it as a part of a larger suppression of women (by men) as an expression and manifestation of male dominance (Seifert, 1996, p. 41). This argument leads us to the next section of this chapter in which the understanding of war as gendered will be discussed.

3.2.3 War as Gendered

A general problem with studying sexual violence solely through the theoretical lenses of more traditional conflict studies is that this segment of literature generally do not include gender as a significant analytical category (Leiby, 2009, p. 446). A gendered understanding of war might be useful when conceptualizing about wartime sexual violence both because research has found that men and women are affected differently by civil war¹⁵, but also because the narrative of war itself often is *gendered* (Leiby, 2009). Labeling war as gendered is not necessarily linked to the biological sexes, but rather to a social understanding of what constitutes masculinity and femininity. This division is linked to particular warring identities, in which the masculine is portrayed as aggressive, strong, warring and protective, and the feminine as peaceful, nurturing, and in need of protection (Baaz & Stern, 2013, p. 20).

A part of the research on the gendered nature of war also sees the military as a ‘masculine’ entity, in which men and women who join an armed group are taught or socialized into an acceptance of violence as a legitimate tool to protect that group’s interests (Baaz & Stern, 2008, p. 66). This line of thought understands the rapist as produced through militarization, and asserts that “*soldiers who engage in sexual violence are answering the call to fulfill ideal types of military masculinity and in so doing are adhering to established norms*” (Baaz & Stern, 2013, p. 27). Along the same lines, wartime sexual violence is understood as a means to ‘feminize’ or humiliate the

¹⁵ Research has found, for instance, that men generally runs higher risk of being killed in war, or being victimized of human rights abuses in general, but that women are more often targeted with wartime sexual violence than men (Human Security Report Project, 2005; Leiby, 2009).

enemy, either through targeting him directly or through targeting him indirectly, and hence implying that he is not able to protect his people or territory (Baaz & Stern, 2008, p. 67).

One strand of literature is also focused on studying the meaning of women's bodies in war, including the particular brutality with which women's bodies are handled when victimized with wartime sexual violence, including for instance the dismembering of body parts as part of the atrocity. Seifert (1996) argues that "*cases in which a woman's breasts were cut off, her stomach was slashed open, or her vagina torn apart with a weapon or military tool after she had been raped*" (p. 38) only can be understood as "*hatred for femininity as such*" (p. 38). Further, Seifert draws connections between this brutal violence and hatred against women in civil life as well. Leiby (2009), on the other hand, asserts that those cases where extreme brutality follows sexual abuse is particularly impacting the entire community, because it leaves a permanent mark of the terror on the victim's body (Leiby, 2009, p. 461). This reading of wartime sexual violence links back to the discussion of victim identities earlier in this chapter.

Because women are the main source for reproduction of the nation, violating their bodies can be understood as a violation of the nation itself, or of a group's identity (Baaz & Stern, 2013, p. 21). The language describing wartime sexual violence therefore also often draws lines between descriptions of traditional warfare situations and the body – "the body as a battleground" and "the war on bodies" become common metaphors. Similarly, sexual violence is used as metaphors for political acts, one typical example being the labeling of the attack on Nanjing in 1937 as "*the rape of Nanjing*" (Skjelsbaek, 2011, p. 65).

According to Kirby (2013), a significant contribution from feminist scholarship in International Relations to the study of wartime sexual violence, is the discourse of rape as a 'weapon of war'. Kirby (2013) asserts that feminist scholars were the first to categorize rape as an integral part of warfare, rather than an effect of it, and that they also were the first to claim that rape in general should be understood as a "*political form of aggression*" (pp. 799-800). The discourse of rape as a weapon and strategy of war will be the subject of discussion for the remainder of this chapter.

3.2.4 The “Strategy” Debate

With the increased scholarly attention dedicated to wartime sexual violence over recent years, a debate has also evolved on the language we use to describe and explain sexual violence in war. The 1990s saw the initiation of the discourse of rape as strategic in conflict, but already in 1996 Seifert warned that sexual violence used as strategy is only one component of the comprehensive problem of sexual violence during war (Seifert, 1996, p. 37). In recent years, however, scholarly attention, predominantly within feminist literature in IR, has started to problematize our propensity to discuss wartime sexual violence mainly within the ‘weapon of war’ paradigm. Baaz and Stern asserts that “[t]he strategic use of rape is often presented as somehow self-explanatory through its implied universalized storyline of gender and warring” (Baaz & Stern, 2013, p. 4). The rather narrow understanding of the strategic use of rape as self-explanatory might be problematic, however, mainly because this hinders us from accounting for other types of sexual violence occurring in war (Baaz & Stern, 2013). To emphasize this point I find it useful to quote Baaz and Stern at length here:

“In some contexts, such as the conflict in Bosnia, sexual violence in war seems to be best understood as a conscious strategy to fulfill political and military goals; in some military structures, orders are effectively enforced down the chain of command so that such a strategy is (more or less) effectively implemented. However, we discuss how sexual violence can also reflect the opposite: the breakdown of chains of command; indiscipline, rather than discipline; commanders lack of control, rather than their power; the micro-dynamics of violence score-settling rather than decisions of military and political leaders engaged in defeating the enemy” (Baaz & Stern, 2013, p. 5).

Baaz & Stern’s warnings are supported also by other scholars. Quijano and Kelly (2012) argue that the language and the narratives that we use to explain and explore the use of sexual violence in conflict lacks nuances, and that it is problematic that we use the same language to describe and explain contexts at each end of the severity and propensity scale. Cohen et al. (2013, pp. 9-10) assert that one should be cautious with

automatically labeling widespread sexual violence as strategic, because sexual violence can be infrequent, but strategic, as well as frequent, but lacking a strategic purpose. Boesten (2010) also argues that in the context of the internal conflict in Peru, the propensity for labeling the sexual violence in the conflict as a ‘weapon of war’, hindered the identification of other patterns prevalent in that conflict, including rape as consumption, opportunistic rape, forced prostitution, rape by family members, and rape in the aftermath of war. In addition to this, our existing conceptualization of what constitutes wartime sexual violence limits what victims of sexual violence can testify about, and how their stories are framed (Baaz & Stern, 2013; Buss, 2009). For instance, one has seen examples of the narratives of victims of sexual violence being framed purely as stories of wartime rape, even though the stories might also have included many other nuances, including tremendous suffering from other types of physical and psychological strains (See for instance Baaz & Stern, 2013, pp. 32-34).

Within this debate it is also important to emphasize that the division that is being made between strategic and opportunistic sexual violence has clear political implications. Whereas state forces, for instance under international political pressure, will assure that any wartime sexual violence committed by their troops is not strategic or instrumental, human rights groups on the other hand will have an interest in framing wartime sexual violence within the ‘rape as a weapon of war’ framework (Leiby, 2009, p. 48).

For these reasons, Kirby (2013) argues that deconstructing existing categories of wartime sexual violence is important, not only due to epistemological concerns, but also because of “*contingent historical factors (different wars and differing contexts may display different patterns of rape) or analytical distinctions (between acts that are essential to a strategy and those that are peripheral to it)*” (Kirby, 2013, p. 800, original emphasis). The latter two are just as important distinctions, according to Kirby, as concerns about the epistemological foundations that research rests upon.

Such a deconstruction must involve both evolving a more nuanced framework for assessing more precisely *in which contexts* sexual violence can be understood as

strategic, but also addressing what other meanings wartime sexual violence might have. Kirby (2013)'s three modes for accounting for rape in war can be useful in this context. Kirby suggests that wartime sexual violence can be understood within the mode of instrumentality, the mode of unreason, and the mode of mythology (Kirby, 2013, pp. 807-810). An instrumental understanding of wartime sexual violence sees it exclusively as a means to meet a certain end, where the perpetrator decides to rape because it is conceived to be rational, and where a “*intentional component*” is ascribed to the act of rape (Kirby, 2013, p. 807).

Understanding wartime rape within the ‘Unreason’ mode involves accepting that some acts of wartime sexual violence should be understood as irrational, at the same time as they are not necessarily random or chaotic (Kirby, 2013, p. 809). The essence of this mode is the merging of private desires (E.g. sexual desires) with public events (I.e. warfare) (Kirby, 2013, p. 809). Kirby (2013) asserts that the ‘unreason’ mode does not exclude seeing sexual violence as a tool of war, but that it does not involve seeing it as instrumental (p. 810). In other words, “*sexual violence remains political, collective and fundamentally linked to war as a practice, but the apparently instrumental benefits are now rendered not as causes, but as consequences and afterthoughts*” (Kirby, 2013, p. 810).

Finally, Kirby (2013) suggests that the third mode of accounting for wartime sexual violence is ‘mythology’, which could be understood as bridging the gap between instrumentality and unreason, enabling a conceptualization of sexual violence as aimed at a specific goal, while at the same time taking the importance of symbolic drives and meaning into account. In this mode, perpetrators are not understood as acting out of their own interest and will, but rather as actors in a socio-cultural ritual, in which rape as a weapon of war becomes a socially accepted act (Kirby, 2013, p. 811). The rules and norms of the group under scrutiny hence become an important point for inquiry (Kirby, 2013, p. 811). “*Resources matter in sustaining and reproducing a group, but that does not mean that all acts in war are orientated towards that end or even that violence should be understood as an accumulatory strategy in any setting*” (Kirby, 2013, p. 812).

Having introduced the methodological considerations and theoretical framework which guided the analysis, we will now turn our attention to the case under scrutiny. The following chapter will introduce relevant background information about the conflict in Colombia. Chapter 5 will discuss the patterns identified in the empirical material, and chapter 6 will provide an analysis of these patterns with a particular focus on the *functions* of sexual violence in the conflict in Colombia.

4 BACKGROUND

This chapter will provide a general overview of the development of conflict in Colombia, followed by an introduction of the main parties to the conflict. The chapter will conclude with a look at two aspects that are central to the conflict in Colombia: the importance of territorial control, and the widespread targeting of civilians.

4.1 The Conflict in Colombia: A Brief Historical Overview

Political violence has been a recurring problem in Colombian society over many decades, and the current conflict arguably has roots dating back to Spanish colonialism, which ended in 1819 (Metelits, 2010, p. 84; Uppsala Conflict Data Program, Conflict Encyclopedia, Retrieved 18.03.14. Henceforth UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14)¹⁶. The Spanish left the country with deep social, racial, and ethnical cleavages, due to their legacy of unequal distribution, and practices reinforcing topographic and cultural divisions (Metelits, 2010, p. 80; Safford & Palacios, 2002, p. 27).

After independence, Colombia was politically divided between conservative forces, mainly from the clergy, and liberal parties, whose constituencies were university-educated liberals (Metelits, 2010, p. 84). This division ensured continuity and a sense of political stability in the country, but it has also been the center of much conflict (Metelits, 2010, pp. 82-84). The discrepancy between liberal and conservative forces culminated in the period known as *La Violencia* - “the Violence”, which between 1946 and 1958, saw an intensification of violence leaving between 80,000 and 400,000 people dead (Bailey, 1967, p. 562; UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14; Safford & Palacios, 2002, p. 345).

A significant characteristic of *La Violencia* was its effect on the dynamics of local communities. In general, communities would be dominated by one of the two main

¹⁶ <http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/gpcountry.php?id=35&value=4>

groups, and official institutions such as the police force, the judiciary, and the church became tools for the parties to the conflict (Carroll, 2011, p. 5). Because these institutions would no longer act in the public interest to denounce crime and solve disputes, self-defense groups evolved. Eventually, a vast range of groups were involved in the fighting, including local party organizations from the conservative and liberal parties, as well as peasant organizations, criminal bands, socialist groups and private armies belonging to large landowners (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14) .

In 1958 the conflict between liberals and conservatives was resolved with a power-sharing agreement known as the National Front, in which it was established that the parties should take turns holding the presidential position, and that the congress should be divided proportionally between them (Caritas staff, personal interview, 13.01.14; Carroll, 2011, pp. 5-6; UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). This division of power did, however, function to exclude some groups, for instance communist groups, from exerting political influence. In addition, communist groups were also targeted by the state, both through direct attacks and through censorship (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). As a reaction to these attacks, the exclusion from political participation, and the general weakness of the Colombian state, leftist guerilla groups formed in the 1960s (Caritas staff, personal interview, 13.01.14 ; Carroll, 2011, p. 7).

The period from the 1960s to the late 1980s saw the emergence of a number of leftist insurgent groups, and the widespread violence from the 1950s was transformed into more organized warfare between the guerillas, which promoted revolutionary transformation of Colombian society, and the armed forces and paramilitary groups, which attempted to preserve status quo (Safford & Palacios, 2002, p. 354). Throughout the 1970s, little progress was made with the revolutionary project of the leftist insurgent groups, but a new factor was introduced into the conflict dynamics when coca production became an important source of income both for insurgent groups and criminal bands (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). By the end of that decade, insurgent groups had become stronger and attacks were initiated both in urban areas and directly against the Colombian armed forces (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). As a result of this, the Colombian government started searching for a political solution to the conflict

around 1980 (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). During the 1980s several attempts were made to negotiate an agreement with the guerilla groups, and these efforts culminated in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the demobilization of the M-19 and the EPL¹⁷, as well as a number of smaller guerilla groups (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14).

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, the conflict in Colombia moved into a new phase which was characterized by warfare combined with more “mafia-type” fighting solely for economic purposes (Safford & Palacios, 2002, p. 347). At the same time, the early 1990s saw an increase in direct confrontation between guerilla groups and the armed forces, something that resulted in increased paramilitary activity and the formation of the umbrella organization for paramilitary groups, AUC (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). Since 2004-2005, the intensity of the conflict has decreased again, but attempts to negotiate a peace agreement have thus far not been successful (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). FARC and the government are currently in peace talks that were initiated in November 2012, where the parties have so far agreed on two points on the six-point agenda (BBC, 2013b; UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14).

Having outlined the main trajectories of the conflict in Colombia we will now move to an introduction of the different armed actors that are considered in the analysis.

4.2 An Overview of the Parties to the Conflict

Generally, one could speak of three main groups of actors in the conflict in Colombia; one legal actor, the Colombian armed forces, and two factions of illegal actors, the paramilitary structures, and the leftist insurgent groups. In addition to the actual members of the illegal armed groups, all of them have also had collaborators, often in towns or cities, who are not necessarily part of the group as such, but who provide them with information and assistance (Caritas staff, personal interview 13.01.14).

¹⁷ With the exception of one smaller dissident group

According to the UCDP, four insurgent groups should be considered the main actors among the leftist groups in the Colombian conflict; the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), the ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, National Liberation Army), the M-19 (Movimiento 19 de Abril, 19th of April Movement), and the EPL (Ejército Popular de Liberación, Popular Liberation Army) (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). FARC, ELN, and EPL were founded in the 1960s, whereas M-19 was founded in 1972. The M-19 and EPL demobilized in the early 1990s, following an agreement with the government, but FARC and ELN are still in existence, with FARC being the more influential of the two.

In this section, a brief introduction to the FARC and the ELN will be given. As M-19 is considered in the analysis, this group will also be introduced. EPL, as well as a number of other smaller insurgent groups which all demobilized in the early 1990s, will not be given any further introduction as they are not considered in the analysis. In addition to the introduction of the insurgent groups, this section also contains an introduction to the paramilitary structures and the state armed forces.

4.2.1 FARC

FARC started out as a self-defense group, which later evolved into an offensive guerilla movement with a distinct political and military doctrine¹⁸ (BBC, 2013a; UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14; Brittain, 2010; Safford & Palacios, 2002, pp. 355-356). Because of FARC's origins within the peasant population, its aims have mainly evolved around supporting this groups' right to land ownership and improved working conditions, in a "*society of small property owners*" (Safford & Palacios, 2002, p. 354). Even though FARC initially also intended to overthrow the government and instill a new one based on Marxists ideals, it appears as if the group no longer has a political plan for socialist revolution, and that their focus is predominantly local rather than national (Safford & Palacios, 2002, p. 364).

¹⁸ The group has been inspired by the ideals of Marx and Guevara.

It is estimated that FARC currently has 9,000-15,000 active members (Amnesty International, 2011; UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). Compared to the paramilitaries and the armed forces, FARC has a higher proportion of women within their ranks, and their combatants are generally younger and less educated than those of the paramilitaries (Sanín, 2008, p. 10). In recent years, a vast number of its recruits have been peasant youth who have joined mainly because of a lack of social and economic opportunities (Chernick, 2009). For this reason, analysts have started to question how deep ideological conviction run among most current members of FARC. While ideological indoctrination seems to have been a significant part of training in earlier years, there are now testimonies suggesting that new members are only given military training, without being indoctrinated ideologically (Geneva Call staff, personal interview 17.01.14; UN Women staff, personal interview, 22.01.14).

FARC has been known for creating local strongholds in towns and rural areas, in which they at times have filled a state-like function, creating social and judicial systems, and exerting control over the local population (Caritas staff, personal interview, 13.01.14 ; Amnesty International, 2011; Metelits, 2010). There are examples of FARC investigating and prosecuting human rights abuses both among civilians in its strongholds and within its own ranks (Metelits, 2010, p. 79). Unlike paramilitary groups, FARC has a clear line of command, and looting or the use of violence for personal gain is generally, though not always, punished (Sanín, 2008).

Observers claim, however, to have seen a change in FARC in the 1990s, in terms of the extent of human rights abuses, accompanying the repeated attack on the group by paramilitary structures (BBC, 2013a; Metelits, 2010). Like paramilitary groups, FARC is involved in drug trafficking and other illegal business to fund their warfare (Safford & Palacios, 2002, p. 357; Sanín, 2008, p. 5). It has been argued that the increased reliance on illicit trade is responsible for some of the change in FARC's behavior, but others argue that active rivalry, most significantly from the paramilitaries, explain the change, as illicit drug trade was happening long before FARC changed their treatment of the rural population (Metelits, 2010, pp. 79-80). FARC is still in control in some areas of Colombia (BBC, 2013a). Their support base in the population is, however,

generally low, even though some local communities still support their cause (Caritas staff, personal interview, 13.01.14).

4.2.2 ELN

ELN, which has an estimated combatant force of 2,500- 3,000 individuals, were founded by revolutionary students who were inspired by the ideas of Che Guevara, but whom at the same time had close ties to Catholicism (Amnesty International, 2011; Carroll, 2011, p. 7; UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). Unlike FARC, which is an agrarian-communist movement, ELN has been labeled as a *foquista*¹⁹ movement.

The group went through a demobilization process in the early 1990s, but most of its combatants stayed armed, and ELN was at a peak in terms of influence in the end of the 1990s (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). Today, ELN has limited influence in Colombia and it has been argued that their limited importance in part is due to the group's inability or unwillingness to adapt to some of the developing dynamics of the conflict, such as the brutality with which territorial control is exerted, the increasingly financial focus of the conflict, and the uncritical recruitment of combatants (BBC, 2013a; Valencia, 2009, p. 96). At the same time, it should be noted that ELN has always relied on kidnapping and illicit business (such as extraction of oil) for funding its warfare, and recent reports suggest that the group is now also involved in drug trade (BBC, 2013a; UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14).

ELN and FARC have been far from each other politically and ideologically, and they have also had armed confrontations between themselves. In later years, however, efforts have been made to coordinate the two groups more, but so far no final agreement with regards to terms of a cooperation have been reached (Caritas staff, personal interview, 13.01.14).

¹⁹ Foquista movements are inspired by Guevara's theories of revolution in which it was asserted that a revolution must be led by an urban vanguard, but that direct ties to the peasantry should be created in order to create a revolutionary *foco* (focus) (Safford & Palacios, 2002, p. 355)

4.2.3 M-19

The M-19 emerged from the cooperation between a group that had been excluded from FARC and the leftist wing of the political party ANAPO²⁰ (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). The M-19 was a *foquista* movement like ELN, but compared to FARC and ELN, the M-19 was more nationalistic than communist (Safford & Palacios, 2002, p. 355; UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). According to the ex-combatants from M-19, this group had high levels of ideological conviction among its constituents, and members were expected to pursue an academic education to supplement their military training (Ex-combatant I, personal interview, 21.01.14; Ex-combatants II & III, personal interview, 31.01.14). Because of the relatively high level of education among group members, as compared to for instance the members of FARC, one ex-combatant from M-19 asserted that the consciousness around issues such as gender equality was higher in this group compared to the other insurgent groups (Ex-combatant I, personal interview 21.01.14).

The M-19 was at its height of influence and popularity in 1980, when it managed to expose the weakness of the Colombian state on several occasions (Safford & Palacios, 2002, pp. 359-360). In 1985, however, an attempt by the group to seize the Palace of Justice in Bogotá failed catastrophically, when the armed forces ended up shelling the building, leaving most of the members of Colombia's Supreme Court, as well as a number of lawyers, civilians, and guerillas dead (Safford & Palacios, 2002, p. 360). Following this attack the group lost extensively both in terms of popularity and ideological conviction, and it ended up demobilizing under a government amnesty between 1989 and 1994 (Safford & Palacios, 2002, p. 360; UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14).

4.2.4 The Paramilitary Groups

Unlike the different leftist insurgent groups, Colombia's paramilitary groups have never been one coherent structure, but rather consisted of a number of armed groups which have developed over decades according to regional dynamics and with different

²⁰ National Popular Alliance

political agendas, however always on the interface between military and economic interests (Sanín, 2008, p. 28; Tate, 2009, p. 115). The oldest of these groups have their origin in a legal army initiative from 1965 in which civilian «self-defense groups» were set up to support the army during counter-insurgency operations (Amnesty International, 2011, p. 13; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2006). Later, the original paramilitary groups became stronger through alliances with economic and political strongholds throughout the country, and paramilitary interests hence developed into a combination of securing right-wing, conservative values, upheld by the large landowners, and strong counter-insurgency sentiments (Caritas staff, personal interview 13.01.14; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2006; Tate, 2009). Furthermore, as the groups increasingly became funded by drug trade from the late 1980s onwards, the economic interest of drug cartels have also become important paramilitary goals (Caritas staff, personal interview 13.01.14; Tate, 2009, pp. 115-117). The paramilitary groups have consisted of mainly male combatants, who have been paid for their activity in the group, at the same time as they have had access to economic incentives during fighting (Sanín, 2008, p. 16). Generally, the organizational hierarchy and military structure within the groups have been weak, and the autonomy of local leaders and commandants have been extensive (Sanín, 2008, pp. 16-18).

Paramilitarism became forbidden by law in Colombia in 1989, but paramilitary structures supported by sections of the security forces, rich landowners and drug-lords, continued to exist (Amnesty International, 2011, p. 13; Tate, 2009, p. 116). As a reaction to increased guerilla activity in the 1990s, 32 paramilitary groups organized themselves in the umbrella organization *Autodefensas Unidas Colombia* (AUC – United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). The lack of a common political goal did, however, hinder the AUC from becoming a coherent organization, and there were many examples of fighting within the structure (Caritas staff, personal interview, 13.01.14). In part, the lack of central organization has been attributed to the varying origins of the different paramilitary groups (Mapp-OEA staff, personal conversation, 24.01.14).

AUC officially demobilized in an extensive demobilization and reintegration process in 2003-2006. Before demobilization the paramilitaries were estimated to comprise between 7,000 and 12,000 combatants, but between 30,000 and 32,000 individuals were part of the demobilization process, suggesting that the organization was more extensive than previously assumed (BBC, 2013a; Sanín, 2008, pp. 7-8). Even though paramilitary groups in Colombia are now officially demobilized, recent reports suggest that previous paramilitary combatants have reorganized and resurfaced in groups known as *Bacrim*²¹ (BBC, 2013a; International Crisis Group, 2007). These groups continue to terrorize the civilian population in order to control territories which are important for drug trade or large-scale extractive businesses (Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14).

4.2.5 The Colombian State Armed Forces

The Colombian army has a stated two-fold mission: to neutralize insurgency groups and to counteract drug trafficking (Colombian National Army, 2009). The strategies to pursue these missions have varied, but in the early 1960s a strategy was implemented for counter-insurgency operations, in which the creation of civilian self-defense groups, provided with weaponry from the army, was a central factor (Amnesty International, 2011; UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). As outlined above, these groups formed the basis for the paramilitary structures, and up until 1989, the armed forces cooperated with paramilitary groups (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14).

When paramilitarism became illegal in 1989, the official cooperation between paramilitary groups and the army ended, but continued co-operation between factions of the armed forces and different paramilitary groups have been documented. For instance there have been indirect or direct support from members of the police force or the army to human rights abuses committed by paramilitary combatants (Corporación Humanas, 2013; UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). One has also seen that in areas where the paramilitaries are strong, members of the armed forces are generally not involved in violence against civilians, whereas in areas where the paramilitaries are weak, there

²¹ Short for *Bandas Criminales* - Criminal bands

have been more reported cases of attacks on civilians by members of the army (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14) .

The previously discussed intensification of the conflict towards the end of the 1990s, was in part caused by the Colombian government's unwillingness to recognize its opponents as armed actors, rather than terrorist organizations, with its assertions that the fighting in Colombia constituted a "war on terror", rather than an internal conflict (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). This also influenced its treatment of civilians. On occasions the nature of the conflict has made the Colombian army unable to distinguish between guerilla soldiers and civilians, but according to UCDP, the army has also at times been unwilling to make this distinction (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). For example, it instructed its troops in the mid-1990s to effectively target the insurgent groups' 'support-network' in the civilian population (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14).

In terms of their demographic profile, the Colombian army consists predominantly of male soldiers. Women were allowed into the armed forces in 1982, but only in administrative or professional positions²², and they are still not allowed to take part in direct combat (Colombian National Army, 2006).

4.3 Two Central Aspects of Conflict in Colombia: Territorial Control and the Targeting of Civilians

4.3.1 Territorial Control

Territorial control has always been a central point of discrepancy in the conflicts in Colombia. The country has vast natural resources and a high reliance on agricultural products, which makes land an important asset. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, repeated land reforms were implemented, in attempts to acquire public land to be used for small- and medium sized farms (Carroll, 2011, p. 7; Metelits, 2010, p. 85). It has become clear, however, that these reforms were all predominantly implemented to stimulate capitalist economic growth, rather than the

²² E.g. doctor, nurse, or technician.

inclusion of peasants into economic and political life, and this has been the root to much conflict (Carroll, 2011, p. 7; Metelits, 2010, pp. 85-87). Violence has been the general means of communication and the territorial disputes have resulted in vast social differences in the country, which currently has rural poverty levels at approximately 80 % of the population (Bouvier, 2009, p. 8; Metelits, 2010, pp. 82-83).

Territorial disputes have also been further actualized through the extensive reliance on drug trade to finance combat (Caritas staff, personal interview, 13.01.14). Armed groups rely on the cooperation and suppression of rural populations to be able to freely grow, produce, and transport coca and poppy seeds, and the control of strategic areas are hence pivotal (Sandvik & Lemaitre, 2013, p. 538). All illegal armed actors, in addition to criminal bands and drug cartels, are involved in the drug trade and the anarchic conditions in the drug market has created a situation of widespread violence among the different actors and towards civilians who finds themselves in the cross-fire (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). This additional dimension of the conflict, which has been particularly prevalent over the last decades, has clearly contributed to its perpetuation and intractability (Bouvier, 2009, p. 4; UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14).

4.3.2 Civilian Victims

Civilians are significant targets in the conflict, and already marginalized groups, including indigenous people, Afro-Colombians, the rural poor, and women appear to be the most common victims of war-related atrocities (Bouvier, 2009, p. 8). Generally, civilians are targeted by the different armed groups due to accusations of being either informants for the paramilitaries, guerilla sympathizers or involved in drug trade (Sandvik & Lemaitre, 2013, p. 39). Often, however, living in a territory controlled by one armed group is sufficient reason to be targeted by another one (Caritas staff, personal interview, 13.01.14).

As outlined above, all groups to the conflict, including the army, have been responsible for targeting civilians. The Colombian army has most commonly targeted civilians in areas where the paramilitary groups have been weak, and the targets have

usually been individuals whom the army perceived to be guerilla sympathizers (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). The paramilitaries appear to have targeted civilians on similar grounds, but paramilitary groups involved in drug trafficking have also targeted civilians that have been involved in the investigation and jurisdiction of drug crimes, as well as their families (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). The leftist insurgent groups appear to have been targeting perceived paramilitary supporters, but also civilians in their territories who have failed to pay ‘war taxes’ to them (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). The ELN has also targeted individuals they have seen as representing neoliberal politics, for example oil workers, whereas FARC has on occasions killed civilians whom they had put on trial in what they called “popular trials” for crimes such as rape (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14). Finally, the insurgent groups have also killed civilians during kidnappings.

The leftist insurgent groups are known to have had guidelines for following human rights and limiting the harm done to civilians, but it appears such guidelines are not always followed. According to UCDP, FARC has on occasions argued that international humanitarian law is “open to interpretation” or does “not apply in the Colombian context” (UCDP, retrieved 18.03.14).

4.3.3 Internal Displacement

The extensive targeting of civilians, in combination with widespread territorial disputes, has created massive internal displacement in Colombia. Recent estimates suggest that as much as 13 % of the rural population is currently displaced, and that between 4,9 – 5,5 million people are living as internally displaced people (Bouvier, 2009; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2013b, p. 8). Some of these have been displaced from their original home territories for decades, whereas a large segment of them were displaced during the 1990s (Caritas staff, personal interview 13.01.14). Displacement is a continuing process in Colombia, mainly due to the territoriality of the conflict, and it is hence one of the most significant effects the conflict has had on the civil population (Meertens, 2001).

Through displacement, civilians also often find themselves as pawns in the games of the different armed groups. Generally, the only way for rural poor to get access to land for cultivating crops is by being “given” access to this land by one of the armed groups. When peasants are given access to land by an armed group, this usually involves displacing peasants that were already living in this territory (Caritas staff, personal interview, 13.01.14).

Having outlined briefly the main trajectories of conflict in Colombia, as well as introduced the parties to the conflict, we will now turn our focus to the perpetration of sexual violence in this conflict.

5 CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA: CONTEXTS, PERPETRATORS, VICTIMS

This chapter will introduce the empirical data which formed the basis for the analysis. As discussed in chapter 2, the data material consists of personal interviews²³ with representatives from human rights, women's rights, humanitarian and legal aid organizations, as well as three ex-combatants from the leftist insurgent groups M-19 and FARC. One interview was also conducted with a representative from UN Women in Colombia, and information was retrieved from a staff-member from the DDR-program²⁴ at Mapp-OEA²⁵ through a personal conversation. In addition to the interviews, written material, including reports and documents from different NGOs, UN-organizations and scholars, have been analyzed.

5.1 In which contexts does wartime sexual violence happen in Colombia?

A starting point for mapping out patterns and purposes of sexual violence is looking at the contexts in which this violence takes place. As discussed in chapter 3, the literature has identified a number of contexts in which wartime sexual violence has been perpetrated, including during massacres and ethnic cleansing, during strategic intelligence gathering, or as reproductive destruction, to mention a few. During the work with this project, five contexts in which sexual violence have been perpetrated in the conflict in Colombia were identified. These contexts will be presented in this section.

²³ Whenever direct quotations from interviews or conversations are referenced, these are based on direct translations done by my translator. The exceptions are the interview with the representative from Oxfam and the conversation with the staff member from Mapp-OEA. These informants spoke English, and any quotations are hence direct quotes. Whenever clarifications have been added by me, these are found in brackets.

²⁴ Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration.

²⁵ *Misión de Apoyo al Proceso de Paz en Colombia* [Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia from the Organization of American States]

The Colombian human rights organization, *Corporación Humanas*, has identified four contexts in which sexual violence happens in Colombia: During attack; to limit personal liberty; to manifest or secure territorial domination; and finally internally in armed groups (Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14). In each of these contexts, the human rights' group argues that the ultimate goal of perpetrating such acts is distinctly different (Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14). I argue, however, that sexual violence to limit personal liberty and sexual violence to exert territorial control often will overlap and have similar goals. Additionally, other informants also brought up use of sexual violence which does not necessarily fit within these categories, for instance sexual violence against female combatants when they are captured or in detention (Ex-combatant II & Ex-combatant III, personal interview, 31.01.14).

Based on this, and drawing upon available data material, I have identified five distinct contexts in which wartime sexual violence has been documented in Colombia. These five contexts are: sexual violence during incursions; sexual violence to exert territorial control; sexual violence against victims in detention or captivity; sexual violence within ranks; and finally sexual slavery enabled by the ongoing conflict.

Before a further introduction to the five contexts is given, however, a brief discussion of such categories in social scientific work is in order. Whenever social phenomena are categorized for the purpose of academic analysis, this represent an act of fitting reality into categories which to some extent are artificial or ideal types, and which will hence to some degree be a simplification of the phenomenon under scrutiny. The struggle between the parsimony of a model and its ability to reflect and describe the subject under study is constant, and the simpler a model is, the more likely it is that it will not reflect social reality, which usually is complex. Nevertheless, the use of analytical categories to organize empirical material is useful, as long as one keep Bailey (1967)'s warning in mind of not “*.falling into the error of thinking that by categorizing, we have explained*” (pp. 563-564). The contexts presented in this section are not necessarily completely mutually exclusive, but may overlap at times. Even so, however, they have distinct features which make it sensible to discuss them separately.

5.1.1 Sexual Violence during Incursions

This category includes contexts where sexual violence is used in temporally restricted attacks. The attack can be an isolated event, either because it was a failed attack or because it was an ad hoc occurrence, or it can result in intended or un-intended consequences, such as the securing of territorial control. Since the latter is a consequence which will occur after the initial incursion, this will be discussed as a separate context in chapter 5.1.2. Sexual violence during incursions makes part of a wide repertoire of brutal violence, which borders to appear as chaotic and indiscriminate. This might take the form of selective attacks on individuals or families, or it can be generalized, and at times indiscriminate, when sexual violence is part of a larger attack on a town or a territory, for instance as part of a massacre (Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14). The Colombian Attorney General's office has labeled sexual violence in such contexts as 'extreme cruelty', and was in 2013 investigating 81 such cases (ABColumbia, Sisma Mujer, & U.S. Office on Colombia, 2013, paragraph 3.3).

Most of the documented sexual violence which has been committed in the context of generalized attacks is attributed to paramilitary groups, sometimes with the support of legal armed actors. Amnesty International has collected testimonies suggesting that sexual violence has been a prominent part of the AUC's repertoire of violence during attacks, including "*..general attacks on civilian communities, massacres and selective killings*" (Amnesty International, 2004, p. 8). In this context sexual violence appears to be part of a wider repertoire of violence which also involves killings and other forms of torture, as well as the destruction of property, such as burning down houses or setting fire to vehicles (Amnesty International, 2004, 2011; Coomaraswamy, 2002; Corporación Humanas, 2009, 2013; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2006). Within the material at hand, it has not been possible to identify generalized attacks which involved sexual violence exclusively.

During attacks, sexual violence can take different forms, including forced nudity, rape, and sexual mutilation (Amnesty International, 2004; Coomaraswamy, 2002; Inter-

American Commission on Human Rights, 2006). The pretext of the attacks may vary according to the local dynamics of the conflict, and with it the specifics of the violence perpetrated will vary as well. The following testimony, collected by the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women during a visit to Colombia, serves to illustrate what such an attack may entail:

“The paramilitaries arrived in the town, they collected everyone together and put on some music and started to drink, they killed some chickens, raped some women, killed a few people and danced. Paramilitaries wore balaclavas. They forced women to cook for them. They only raped the young girls. Their party went on for four days. The bodies were already beginning to rot in the streets. Some of the bodies were burnt so they couldn’t be identified. We heard a helicopter hovering overhead but no one intervened until the fourth day.” (Coomaraswamy, 2002, p. 13).

This example clearly illustrates how such attacks represent situations of extreme brutality and chaos. Sexual violence during singular attacks on individuals or families is often part of a larger repertoire of violence which makes up an armed group’s endeavors to exert territorial control. Attacks related to the exertion of territorial control may overlap temporally with isolated attacks, but often appear in the aftermath of the initial incursion. Because of this, these attacks have been categorized as a distinct context, which will be introduced below.

5.1.2 Sexual Violence During Territorial Control

A significant segment of the sexual violence that occurs in the conflict in Colombia happens when an armed group is in control of an area or territory (UN Women staff, personal interview, 22.01.14; Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14). The sexual violence perpetrated in this context is made possible by the very fact that the armed group controls the population and land in a given territory, which enables them to exert control through different violent means in order to achieve different ends which is seen as beneficial for the armed group as a total or for individual commanders, combatants or groups of combatants. The sexual violence

perpetrated in this context can therefore take several forms, depending on the objective of the local commander or the war dynamics in the area.

A part of exerting territorial control through the use of sexual violence has been terrorizing and dominating people, hence creating a sense of terror (Ex-combatants II & III, personal interview, 31.01.14, UN Women staff, personal interview, 22.01.14; Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14). The violence also often takes the form of punishment or revenge to alleged sympathizers of enemy armed groups (Amnesty International, 2004). The FARC has declared women who date or otherwise associate with army soldiers or paramilitary combatants as “military targets” in and of themselves (Amnesty International, 2004, p. 8). According to Amnesty International, these individuals are at times targeted with sexual violence, but it is unclear what the nature of this violence is, as documented examples are, to my knowledge, not available. It is clear, however, that paramilitary groups have targeted alleged guerilla sympathizers with sexual violence.

Sexual violence perpetrated in this context can be generalized, targeting members of the entire population of one town or village, or it can be targeted at specific individuals. The reason why violence at times target members of an entire community is the propensity among the armed groups to employ a broad understanding of who should be considered “sympathizers”. Amnesty International asserts that victims have been targeted because of alleged sympathies with an enemy group simply for fleeing conflict areas (Amnesty International, 2012, p. 15). The fact that peasant’s access to land in Colombia usually is granted by the armed group in control in that area (as discussed in chapter 4) creates an extensive base of “sympathizers” who can potentially be targeted by other armed actors. Serving as an example of the latter can be a testimony collected by Amnesty International of the case of a woman who was heading her household because of her husband’s absence (Amnesty International, 2004, p. 20). According to the testimony, the woman was approached by paramilitary combatants who asked her where her husband was, suggesting that since he was away he had to be a guerilla. When the woman replied that her husband had a job which kept him away from home, the paramilitaries asked her to join them. The family later found

the woman dead, lying naked and with clear signs of sexual mutilation (Amnesty International, 2004, p. 20).

A different pattern is found in the case of the paramilitary commander Hernán Giraldo. In the territories under his control, Giraldo would force peasant families to give up some of their daughters to be his mistresses (Corporación Humanas, 2013). In return, Giraldo would offer the families protection, and he would also recognize any child that resulted from these atrocities, and by that creating bonds of confidence with the families in question (Corporación Humanas, 2013).

Because of the terror that it inflicts, sexual violence is also understood as a cause of and tool for forced displacement (Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14; UN Women staff, personal interview, 22.01.14). This is a significant problem in Colombia, which has among the highest numbers of internally displaced people in the world (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2013a). The linkage between sexual violence and internal displacement is the terror that sexual violence inflicts in the territories where it is perpetrated, not only among actual victims, but also among the community at large.

Social control is another central part of territorial dominance. The purpose of social control in this context is to demonstrate power relations and exert terror, through establishing which groups have the power and control to set rules and regulations in a given territory. Social control through perpetration of sexual violence appears to have been used to some degree by both the state army, and paramilitary structures, but the informants from Oxfam and UN Women argued that the paramilitaries might have used the practice more than others (Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14; UN Women staff, personal interview, 22.01.14). Leftist insurgent groups have also exerted social control in the territories under their dominance, but to my knowledge there has not been documented any use of sexual violence in relation to this social control. Amnesty International has collected testimonies suggesting that members of FARC have perpetrated sexual violence against civilian women and girls residing in the areas under their control (Amnesty International, 2004, p. 9), but so far it has not been

possible to determine whether these attacks were the result of individual combatant's initiatives, or whether this happened with the knowledge of commanding officers.

The practice employed by paramilitary groups has been to perpetrate sexual violence as a punishment for behavior deemed unacceptable or illegal: *"They impose strict codes of social conduct, including restrictions on what women may wear and penalties for 'misbehavior'. They reinforced conservative values and the different gender roles expected of men and women"* (Coomaraswamy, 2002, p. 14). Punishment has been targeted against women for acts such as going to parties, practicing witchcraft, gossiping, taking part in social or political organizations, or wearing revealing clothes (Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14; Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14; ILSA staff, personal interview, 29.01.14). One testimony of this has been collected by ABColombia et al. (2013), which explains what happened to a woman who got into a fight in a discotheque in an area controlled by the paramilitary group Los Rastrojos:

"The following day as a punishment Natalie²⁶ was ordered by the Rastrojos to sweep the streets. When she had finished the commander who came to check her work arrived on horseback. The animal defecated and Natalie was order (sic) to clear it up – she refused. The commander then ripped off her clothes and forced her to eat the dung" (ABColombia et al., 2013, Section 3.1).

Paramilitary units have also conducted "social cleansing" in territories under their control. Victims are generally individuals who fall outside the ruling groups' conceptualization of "normal" or "accepted" behavior, and includes petty criminals, prostitutes, drug addicts, homosexual and trans-gendered people, as well as individuals, both male and female, who challenge established gender roles through their appearance or life-choices²⁷ (Amnesty International, 2011, p. 14; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2006, paragraphs 96-101). At times sexual violence is a part of the repertoire of violence used to conduct these operations, for instance

²⁶ Pseudonym

²⁷ For men this may include wearing ear-rings or dying your hair, whereas for women it might include exercising independence through not taking a male partner (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2006).

“prostitutes and women accused of adultery have been paraded nude on trucks around the village with a sign around their neck saying that these women wreck homes” (Coomaraswamy, 2002, p. 14).

What the examples presented in this section serve to illustrate, however, is that there appears to be regional and temporal differences when it comes to how armed groups behave in a given area, and the violence may hence play out differently depending on the local context. The informant from Oxfam explained this the following way:

“Their relationship with a territory depends on (..) the dynamics within the territory. Whether they have a certain control or not, for example sometimes they have control of the city, but not the surrounding areas, sometimes they have control of the surrounding areas, but not of the city. Sometimes they fight with the armed forces, sometimes they collide [cooperate] with [the armed forces]. So it is very regional.” (Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14).

These regional differences appear to affect how and why groups use sexual violence: *“[T]here are differences. Even differences within (..) the groups. (..), the FARC does not act the same (..) in La Guajira as they would in Putumayo. Because it also depends on the commander of the area.”* (Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14). The latter point is significant, as individual preferences of commanders can be a significant factor in determining whether sexual violence is perpetrated or not. Individual commanders can have diverging views and norms, for instance on how they see the graveness of acts of sexual violence, and this can have significant impact on the perpetration of sexual violence, particularly within those groups where commandants enjoy vast autonomy.

5.1.3 Sexual Violence within Ranks

Within Colombia's armed groups sexual violence is used to regulate behavior. Most commonly, this refers to regulating the reproductive abilities of women that are in the group, for instance through forced abortions, forced pregnancies and forced use of contraception, and it appears as if leftist insurgent groups are the main perpetrators of

these types of sexual violence (Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14; IMP staff, personal interview, 28.01.14; Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14; UN Women staff, personal interview, 22.01.14).

Interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch (HRW) with previous combatants from ELN and FARC uncovered a widespread use of forced contraception, and that even very young girls joining the guerillas would have intrauterine devices²⁸ (IUD) inserted by guerilla nurses when they joined the forces (Human Rights Watch, 2003, p. 58). A young ex-combatant from FARC, who joined the group when she was twelve, gave the following testimony to HRW staff:

*“They put in an IUD the day after I arrived. That was the only birth control I ever used. If you get pregnant, you have to have an abortion. Lots of women get pregnant. I had two friends who got pregnant and had to have abortions. They cried and cried. They didn’t want to lose the baby”*²⁹ (Human Rights Watch, 2003, p. 58).

In addition to testimonies collected from demobilized combatants, HRW also reference autopsies conducted on eleven female combatants from FARC which was killed in the army’s counterinsurgency offensive Operation Berlin in 2000, which showed that nine of the eleven women had IUDs inserted (Human Rights Watch, 2003, p. 58).

According to the report from HRW, ELN appears to be more willing to accept pregnancies under some circumstances, but female combatants are strongly discouraged from getting pregnant and having children while in the group, and ex-combatants have testified that there have been occurrences of forced abortions also within ELN (Human Rights Watch, 2003, pp. 58-59). FARC on the other hand, does not seem to accept pregnancies, and forced abortions hence appear to be standard procedure for women who get pregnant while in their ranks. One former member of FARC told the HRW: *“Two years ago, in 2000, I got pregnant. They gave me an abortion, but they didn’t tell me in advance that they were going to do it. They told me*

²⁸ Contraceptive device which is inserted into the uterus

²⁹ «Ángela», an ex-member of FARC, interviewed by HRW staff in Bogotá June 2nd, 2002.

they were checking on it. I wanted to have the baby” (Human Rights Watch, 2003, p. 59)³⁰.

Ex-combatant II and III argued however, that this specific type of sexual violence might be over-reported: “*..it is a lot of truth, but a lot of myth about this topic , (..) the use of sexual violence to control sexuality. (..)[T]here is a lot of myth coming from the women that have demobilized*” (Ex-combatant II, personal interview, 31.01.14). When asked to specify what the myths surrounding this issue were, the informant gave the following explanation:

“Between 1990 and 1994, nine groups, (..) of guerillas were demobilized. (..) And we demobilized in groups. So, as groups, and because it was part of a negotiation, regretting and saying what happened to us and saying (..) ‘I was victim of this and that’ was not necessary, because it was an agreement with the government, (..). But starting the year -94 when somebody demobilized, they demobilized individually, and (..) a requisite became to give information and to repent. And the more you repent and the more you give information (..), the more benefits you get. So a lot of women had to victimize themselves. You know, (..) say ‘(..) I suffered, I was forced, I was raped, I had forced abortion’, so that they get more points once they are out in society. And that worries me about investigations because when people carry out investigations they talk to these women, and these women are going to tell a bunch of stories, but when we talk to these women, the women say ‘Oh, I just said that because I was forced, I did not even want to leave the guerillas, I had to tell these stories’. (..). As much as there is truth about forced abortions and all that, there is also a lot of myth, because these women, starting the year -94, kind of have to victimize themselves to get benefits. And they are young and (..) can be easily manipulated” (Ex-combatant II, personal interview, 31.01.14).

Examples of forced sexual intercourse within ranks was also brought up by some informants when discussing FARC, but documentation about this is limited and it is difficult at this point to say anything certain about how widespread it is (Corporación

³⁰ «Andrea», former member of FARC, interviewed by HRW-staff in Bucaramanga, June 8th, 2002.

Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14). The informant from Geneva Call said: *“Organizations do not quite know what happens to the women within the guerillas. There is silence about this subject. One problem is that it is difficult to get there, to get to speak with these women because they are in the conflict. And once the women are demobilized and leave these groups there are doubts about what they say because they may victimize themselves to get rewarded (...). But we do know that there are problems within the groups, because they have forced abortion, because they are forced to take the pill (..), because they may be used by the men, used sexually. So there are problems within the groups, but we do not have access to that information”* (Geneva Call staff, personal interview, 17.01.14).

The ex-combatants that I interviewed did not, however, have experience or knowledge of sexual violence within the units that they had been in (Ex-combatant I, personal interview 21.01.14; Ex-combatants II & III, personal interview 31.01.14). Ex-combatant I asserted: *“I did not experience sexual violence, I was not coerced sexually to be there, I did not have any experiences of sexual violence towards me, and I cannot talk for all the other women. Maybe there are cases, but it is not right for me to talk about them. I do not know, I was not there. In general, the women who were militants from different insurgent groups say that there is nothing to talk about, there was no sexual violence here. Even women from la FARC”* (Ex-combatant I, personal interview 21.01.14).

5.1.4 Sexual Violence in Detention or Captivity

Wartime sexual violence is also perpetrated against victims in captivity or detention, taking the form of sexual torture against adversary combatants. Sexual violence in captivity can be intimately related to sexual violence in attacks, as the capture of enemy combatants or their collaborators may be a goal or end-point of attacks. When armed actors are victimized with sexual violence during attacks, this often happens when they are in an enemy's captivity (Ex-combatant II and III, personal interview, 31.01.14).

Furthermore, there have been examples in Colombia of female armed actors being victimized with sexual violence by state armed forces when in detention (Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14; Ex-combatant I, personal interview 21.01.14; Ex-combatants II & III, personal interview, 31.01.14). One of the ex-combatants mentioned that there are very few examples in Colombia of women speaking up about what they have experienced in detention, but that there have been cases of women being victimized of sexual violence as a part of torture (Ex-combatant II, personal interview, 31.01.14). The informant saw this victimization as a means to collect information and argued: *“The recent women that abandoned the lines and demobilized voluntarily they go to a program (..). And part of this program (..) is giving information. So that when they go out of the lines [ranks], they have the problem that the people from the state forces pressure them sexually to give information (..) And when there is not the actual act of sexual violence, there is a lot of threatening. Having the woman naked to weaken her, or touching her”* (Ex-combatant II, personal interview, 31.01.14).

These cases are, however, underreported, and there is currently a clear lack of documentation. The available information is mostly based on rumors and anecdotes. One of the ex-combatants asserted that cases of sexual violence in state detention were usually not reported because of a general sentiment of the *guerilleras* ‘getting what they deserved’: *“Society in general is very polarized, so they think, like.. ‘Oh, he got killed? He is from the guerillas, it does not matter. It is not denounced; it is not considered a crime, because they do not have rights”* (Ex-combatant II, personal interview, 31.01.14).

5.1.5 Sexual Slavery Enabled by the Conflict

Another understudied aspect of wartime sexual violence in Colombia, is that of sexual slavery which is linked to or enabled by the ongoing conflict. This category refers to contexts in which combatants or commanders use their position as armed actors to force or entice women into unpaid prostitution, either to be utilized for the armed actor’s own pleasure or as a business venture. Roth, Guberek, and Green (2011) assert

that there are “high levels” of sexual violence committed against sex workers in Colombia, particularly in the regions of Antioquia, Urabá and Montes de María (p. 56). There is, however, limited knowledge on this group as victims.

Additionally, there is also emerging documentation of armed groups forcefully recruiting young women in towns under their control to perform sex work (ABColombia et al., 2013, section 3.2). This appears to be linked to the practice outlined under the section on territorial control above, where young women reportedly have been taken from their families, either by force or enticement, to serve as mistresses for paramilitary group members. When the groups no longer wish to keep these girls as mistresses, several of them are forced into prostitution, while others are killed (ABColombia et al., 2013, section 3.2). In their report, ABColombia et al. (2013) gives some clear examples of how this specific context of sexual violence is functioning to create a sense of terror, for instance as parents are keeping their daughters indoors, or even in their own beds at night, in attempts to protect them from the paramilitaries.

Furthermore, women who were already working as prostitutes have also been taken from the streets by paramilitary groups, and sent to more rural areas where the combatants would have little access to women. These women would initially be promised pay, but once there, no payments would be made (Corporacion Humanas staff, personal interview 16.01.14; Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14).

For some paramilitary groups, sexual slavery has appeared to be a business venture. The department of Putumayo, which was under paramilitary control over a number of years, did for instance end up as a centrum for sexual slavery and human trafficking (UN Women staff, personal interview, 22.01.14; Oxfam staff, personal interview 30.01.14). Sexual slavery run by paramilitary structures has also been reported in connection to extractive businesses. High levels of corruption in Colombia assure the presence of armed groups around most extractive businesses. Either they are directly controlling the trade or they do so indirectly by black-mailing business-owners (Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14). In connection to this, NGOs has

documented that women is taken from the streets of bigger cities like Cartagena, Cali, or Medellin, and shipped out to the industrial areas where they serve as sexual slaves for three-four days (Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14). The informant from Oxfam asserted:

“[T]hey go to the big cities, they get girls who are already prostitutes, they take the girls in busses, (..) they take them to the mining camps to serve for the miners for a couple of days and they charge the girls and they charge the miners” (Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14).

Sexual violence in this context may hence both be motivated by a search for sexual pleasure for the armed groups themselves, in situations where they have limited access to women, and also as means to extract financial profit.

Having outlined the five contexts in which wartime sexual violence is perpetrated in Colombia, we will now turn to a discussion of the two central groups of actors in these atrocities: the perpetrators and the victims.

5.2 Who are the main perpetrators?

“I do think there is a division between the groups, in the way they treat sexual violence and the way they treat women. However, they do have things in common” (Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14).

There are multiple claims in Colombia about which armed group is the main perpetrator of sexual violence, but it seems clear that all the groups have perpetrated *some* sexual violence in the conflict (Alianza Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz - IMP et al., 2013; Amnesty International, 2004, p. 6). The patterns of perpetration varies somewhat, however, between the different groups.

Since sound statistics are missing, we are not equipped to make a numerical assessment of who the main perpetrators of sexual violence in Colombia are. One of the main findings of a study from 2011 which compared existing quantitative data sets

on sexual violence in Colombia, was that there currently is not enough compiled data to do a quantitative study of this phenomenon (Roth et al., 2011, pp. 58-60). Even though we cannot determine who the *most frequent* perpetrators are we can still attempt a qualitative assessment of who the perpetrators of the different sexual offences tend to be. This is important also for theorizing about sexual violence in war, as much existing framework is based on an analysis of characteristics of the armed groups perpetrating the crimes, as outlined in chapter 3.

The informants from Geneva Call, IMP, and Oxfam, in addition to ex-combatants II and III, claimed that the state army was the main perpetrator of sexual violence in the conflict. One informant even argued that if you get access to unofficial data of the General Attorney you would see that the main group of alleged suspects comes from the armed forces (Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14). The informant further asserted: *“At this point the armed forces are responsible for the vast majority of cases of sexual violence. Specifically around where the military bases are located. Unfortunately they are located on territories mainly in the Pacific Coast, in peripheral areas of the country, where there mostly are indigenous and afro-Colombians”* (Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14).

The informant from UN Women asserted, however, that paramilitary groups perpetrated sexual violence more than others (UN Women staff, personal interview, 22.01.14). The informant from IMP claimed, on the other hand, that there is not much difference between the different armed groups in Colombia, and that the differences we see in reported frequency reflects only asymmetries in reporting (IMP staff, personal interview, 28.01.14). We can assume that the conflicting narratives presented in the above paragraphs reflect the lack of reliable data, and the need for organizations to rely on deficient or limited statistics.

What appears to be clear, however is that sexual violence committed by paramilitaries is the most documented. When talking about what they understood to be *strategic* use

of sexual violence³¹ most of the informants attributed these acts to paramilitary groups. The informant from *Corporación Humanas* argued: *“I believe that sexual violence is used by all the groups. (...) Even the armed forces of the state take women from the guerilla and rape them to get information and then kill them. Same with the paramilitaries (...). And also within the guerillas you have sexual violence. So all the groups have cases of it, but I do believe that the paramilitaries use it more as a strategy – as an order”* (Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14).

Whether the latter claim reflects truth or not may be challenging to determine given the limited documentation available. However, what appeared as a common notion among most informants was that the paramilitaries seemed to be more prone for using sexual violence in “visible” and traceable situations, often against individuals external to their groups, to control territories or during attacks (Amnesty International, 2004; Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14; Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14; UN Women staff, personal interview, 22.01.14).

Furthermore, the informant from Geneva Call and ex-combatant I also claimed that the leftist insurgent groups do *not* employ sexual violence strategically (Geneva Call staff, personal interview, 17.01.14; Ex-combatant I, personal interview, 21.01.14). The informant from Geneva Call asserted that an internal study produced for them, found only four documented cases of leftist insurgent groups perpetrating sexual violence against civilians or others external to the group (Geneva Call staff, personal interview, 17.01.14). There is, however some skepticism towards these numbers as FARC in particular is still an active part to the conflict, and there is suspicion that cases of sexual violence is not reported due to fear of reprisals (Geneva Call staff, personal interview 17.01.14; IMP staff, personal interview, 28.01.14). The informant from IMP argued: *“Now that the peace process is taking place with the FARC and with the guerillas, I think there will be a lot of documented cases, and that you will see that there are a lot of cases also within the guerillas”* (IMP staff, personal interview, 28.01.14).

³¹ In the cases where the informants did indeed see the use of sexual violence in Colombia as strategic in certain contexts.

The same informant also claimed that there exist documented cases of the FARC attacking families, abducting the men and raping the women (IMP staff, personal interview, 28.01.14). In addition to arguing that FARC used sexual violence in situations of attack, the same informant also argued that there were situations where individuals belonging to FARC benefitted from their gun and uniform to perpetrate sexual violence (IMP staff, personal interview, 28.01.14). The latter claim was supported by other informants who did not believe that the insurgent groups used sexual violence strategically or instrumentally: *“If it happens it is more related to the act of individuals, it is not a part of their politics”* (Geneva Call staff, personal interview, 17.01.14). One of the ex-combatants said during the interview that one could hear of cases where individual commanders were taking advantage of their position and where intimate relationships were initiated for women to improve their positions (Ex-combatant I, personal interview, 21.01.14). There is, however, uncertainty about the degree to which these relationships are consensual or not.

In general, informants from different organizations tended to see the guerilla groups as the main perpetrators of sexual violence within their own ranks (Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14; UN Women staff, personal interview, 22.01.14; Geneva Call staff, personal interview, 17.01.14; Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14). Strong claims were made about this by several of the informants. The informant from Oxfam asserted: *“They have a policy of forced recruitment of young women and girls, starting at the age of 8 or 9, and we have not heard of one case where the girls were not abused within 15 or 10 days of being recruited”* (Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14). Along a similar vein, the informant from IMP claimed: *“All women who have made part of the FARC have experienced some kind of sexual violence, be it sexual abuse, or forced abortion, or forced contraception”* (IMP staff, personal interview, 28.01.14).

At the same time, however, the ex-combatants that I interviewed asserted that sexual violence within ranks in the leftist insurgent groups most likely is over-reported. Ex-combatant I said: *“If you focus on trying to find sexual violence within the insurgent groups, you will not find anything on it. (..) You can have sporadic events, or*

individual cases, but you cannot really speak of it systematically. Sexual violence is not really something that they [the insurgent groups] talk about.” (Ex-combatant I, personal interview 21.01.14)

Another interesting aspect is also the degree to which armed groups change their behavior, over time and between different units and blocs, possibly in reaction to changing circumstances. There are some reasons to believe that repertoires of violence have changed over the course of the conflict in Colombia. There is little information about sexual violence in Colombia prior to the 1990s, so it is difficult to say anything certain about change, but informants were still asked to reflect upon this. When asked about whether sexual violence was a new practice to FARC or if it had always been a part of their repertoire of violence, one informant said that the knowledge of this was limited, but that she had heard of cases as early as in the 1980s and as late as in 2007 (IMP staff, personal interview, 28.01.14). Another informant argued, however, that FARC’s behavior has changed because of their increasing involvement in drug trafficking, an activity that creates a need for territorial control and that removes focus from other areas such as ideological consistency (UN Women staff, personal interview, 22.01.14).

The graveness of the sexual attacks also seems to be differing somewhat depending on individual and personal differences on behalf of the commanders in the different blocs. One example of this is the case of the paramilitary commander Hernán Giraldo, who as discussed above, particularly abused young girls by paying parents in the areas under his control to have some of their daughters as his personal mistresses. There is no documentation suggesting that this was a generalized practice among paramilitary commanders, and it appears to be more likely that it reflected him individually. The graveness of this specific situation hence seems to have been determined by the preferences and practices of this particular commander (Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14; UN Women staff, personal interview, 22.01.14).

To sum up this section, it remains unclear who the most frequent perpetrators of sexual violence are in the Colombian conflict, but overall paramilitary groups appear to be

more likely to perpetrate sexual violence against civilians, and in situations which can rather easily be traced back to them. There are claims that the state armed forces are the most frequent perpetrators, but there is limited documentation of the nature of this. Finally, the guerillas are more prone for using sexual violence internally than are the other groups. This should, however, be understood in the context of the demographics of the groups, as outlined in chapter 4. In general, leftist insurgent groups have significantly higher rates of female combatants than both paramilitary structures and the armed forces. What the discussion of perpetrators has shed light on, however, is the absence of narratives of female perpetrators. It is important to emphasize that this does not necessarily reflect an absence of female perpetrators of sexual violence in the conflict in Colombia, but rather a reproduction of gender stereotypes in available material in which men in general are portrayed as perpetrators, whereas women in general are portrayed as victims.

Having discussed the perpetrators of wartime sexual violence, we will now focus on the other main group in this context, the victims.

5.3 Who are the victims?

Very generally one could differentiate between two groups of victims of sexual violence in Colombia – civilian victims and victims within the armed groups. Who the victims of sexual violence are can also tell us something about the purpose of the act.

5.3.1 Civilians as victims of wartime sexual violence:

More of the informants claimed that the main victims of sexual violence in Colombia are and have been civilian *women* (Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14; Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14; ILSA staff, personal interview, 29.01.14; IMP staff, personal interview, 28.01.14). With a reliance on mostly unconfirmed numbers, it is impossible to verify whether this is indeed the case or not, but the cases that have been reported, and also the testimonies of the different informants working on this issue, suggest such a tendency (Concurred by among

others Amnesty International, 2011; Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2006, paragraph 49). At the same time, however, there is also some documentation of male victims of conflict-related sexual violence in Colombia. According to numbers from the National Forensic Medicine Institute in Bogotá, out of a total of 52 cases under their investigation in 2008, 15 % of the cases, 11 cases in total, had a male victim (Quijano & Kelly, 2012, p. 445). In the UN Secretary General's report on sexual violence in conflict from 2013, there are also specific cases from Colombia in which the victims are male, for instance it is stated that "(i)n May [2012], two boys were held and sexually assaulted at a military checkpoint in Meta" (United Nations Secretary General, 2013, paragraph 27). There are also testimonies suggesting that the particularly brutal violence which was discussed in chapter 3.2.3³² is not only targeted at women in Colombia, but might also be targeted at male victims. In a testimony to the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, "D", a resident in a *barrio*³³ controlled by a paramilitary group explained that this specifically brutal violence affects both men and women: *"In the last two weeks, six women have been killed, some because of their alleged relationship with the guerillas, others because they refuse to give sex. One girl was raped before she was killed; they took out her eyes, pulled out her nails and cut off her breasts. One boy had his penis cut off and put into his mouth."* (Coomaraswamy, 2002, p. 13).

A few informants also mentioned that homosexuals, both male and female, have been attacked sexually by armed actors (Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14; ILSA staff, personal interview, 29.01.14). The informant from ILSA explained: *"For example in the case of lesbian women it is a way to say (..), only men can penetrate women and let me correct you, you go against nature, let me take your body and tell you what you have to be. And this also happens with gay men"* (ILSA staff, personal interview, 29.01.14). Besides these examples, however, the main brunt of the empirical material covered sexual attacks on women, and most of the analysis

³² For instance the dismembering of body parts (Leiby, 2009; Seifert, 1996)

³³ Neighborhood

thus pertain mainly to this group of victims, even though the findings do not necessarily exclude male victims.

Civilians are important targets in the conflict in Colombia for several distinct reasons. It is commonly referenced that civilians are usual targets because they are “caught in the middle”, finding themselves in the cross-fire (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2009, p. 9). This does not mean, however, that the targeting of civilians is simply collateral, civilians are commonly targeted as representatives of a specific group. For example, there are cases where groups of men have been killed or disappeared, leaving the women as the providers of the household and also as the holders of land. Informants suggested that in these cases threats or the actual use of sexual violence would be a common method for forcing these women to sell or give up their land, often leaving them with no other option than to displace to a different part of the country (Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14). Women are also targeted indirectly for being the relative of an enemy, being in a romantic relationship with an enemy combatant, or also for attempting to protect children from forced recruitment into one of the illegal armed groups (Coomaraswamy, 2002, p. 13).

Furthermore, certain groups of civilians appear to be targeted more than others, indigenous Colombians and Afro-Colombians in particular. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, indigenous and Afro-Colombian women “*suffer multiple/intersectional discrimination on the basis of gender, race, color and ethnic origin and as internally displaced persons*” (Coomaraswamy, 2002, p. 10). It is hence argued that the conflict reproduces discrimination which is already existent in society (Coomaraswamy, 2002, p. 13).

Arguably, ethnicity does not appear to be a significant factor in the conflict in Colombia as such, as the conflict is not ethnic in nature per se. Nevertheless, Afro-Colombians and indigenous Colombians appear to be particularly vulnerable for wartime violence in general, including the risk of internal displacement, because they often reside in rural and remote areas, which are strategic territories for coca-production and drug trafficking (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2013c, p. 71). The

regionality of the Colombian conflict hence comes to play in the victimization of groups. According to a report compiled by 27 local NGOs, Afro-Colombians continue to be marginalized socially and economically, and for this reason, these groups are particularly vulnerable for being victimized in the conflict as they are under pressure from armed actors to give up their land or to become a part of the drug industry (Alianza Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz - IMP et al., 2013). According to numbers from UNDP, 63% of indigenous people in Colombia live below the poverty line³⁴, while 47.6 % are also under the destitution line (Referenced in Alianza Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz - IMP et al., 2013, p. 10). This financial marginalization appears to be linked to increased vulnerability to victimization of violence.

Similar findings as those presented above have also been made in other Latin-American civil wars. In her analysis of wartime sexual violence in Peru, Boesten (2010) finds that even though the conflict in Peru was never ethnic per se, the focus on class and the cleavages that ran between different ethnic groups in terms of the social class to which they belonged, created a situation in which ethnicity became important and in which racial targeting became part of wartime sexual violence in that country (Boesten, 2010, p. 111).

Targeting of indigenous groups is also a particular topic, because the stigma connected to sexual violence appears to be particularly high in these communities. Two informants mentioned that cultural practices very often prevent these women from reporting abuse, and there are thus reasons to believe that underreporting is particularly high for this group (Oxfam staff, personal interview, 30.01.14; ILSA staff, personal interview, 29.01.14). Skjelsbaek (2011) has found similar tendencies among Albanian victims of sexual violence in Kosovo in 1999. At that point international society had developed a framework for dealing with wartime sexual violence in the Balkans based on the experience from Bosnia. It soon became clear, however, that the situation in Kosovo was different from Bosnia, since the Albanian population is

³⁴ In comparison, on the national index, 34.1 % of Colombians live under the poverty line (Referenced in Alianza Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz - IMP et al., 2013, p. 10)

considered more conservative than the Muslim population in Bosnia, and hence that women's possibilities for coming forward with what they had experienced were more limited (Skjelsbaek, 2011, p. 71).

Another significant part of the victims also appear to be under-aged girls (Alianza Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz - IMP et al., 2013). According to Amnesty International (2011) young girls are in part targeted because of active gender stereotypes in Colombia which "*place a value on virginity*" (p. 17).

5.3.2 Armed Actors as Victims of Sexual Violence:

Combatants are also victims of sexual violence in Colombia. Predominantly sexual violence within ranks appears to be a problem of the guerilla groups (Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview 16.01.14; Geneva Call staff, personal interview, 17.01.14; UN Women staff, personal interview, 22.01.14; Oxfam staff, in personal interview, 30.01.14). The types of violence that has been reported and documented is forced abortions, forced sexual planning³⁵, and forced sexual intercourse within ranks (Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview 16.01.14; UN Women staff, personal interview, 22.01.14; ILSA staff, personal interview, 29.01.14).

Additionally, there have also been reports of sexual violence committed against *guerilleros* by soldiers from the state army prior to killing them in captivity (Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14). The ex-combatants also mentioned that they all had heard stories and rumors about sexual violence as a part of torture when in captivity or detention, when they were in the insurgent organizations (Ex-combatant I, personal interview, 21.01.14; Ex-combatant II & III, personal interview, 31.01.14). There seems, however, to be a lack of research and little documentation on this topic in particular, presumably partly because the Colombian government is not interested in this information being explored. Ex-combatant I said that this was something that happened "back in the day", specified to the 1970s and 1980s, when torture was more prominent, Ex-combatants II and III believed it to be a

³⁵ Sterilization or contraception

continuous problem. When speaking about her own time in M19, ex-combatant I said: *“..that happened before my time. I never had any case with sexual abuse, not with the opposing armies, not with my own”* (Ex-combatant I, personal interview, 21.01.14).

There are also examples of paramilitary groups attacking female members of paramilitary groups in different regions (Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14).

In general, one informant asserted, there have not been many cases of sexual violence committed by paramilitaries against members of the guerillas and vice versa, simply because there have not been many direct confrontations between the two (IMP staff, personal interview, 28.01.14). However, it is important in this context to distinguish between actual members of an armed group, and supporters. Full-fledged members stay with the guerillas in the camps, and to some extent appear to be protected from external threats of sexual violence due to this, whereas supporters in the cities may be targeted with sexual violence. There have been cases of collaborators being targeted with sexual violence by paramilitary groups (IMP staff, personal interview 28.01.14).

Having explored and discussed the main patterns of wartime sexual violence in Colombia, including the contexts in which sexual violence is perpetrated, and the armed actors and civilian groups that are affected by this violence, either as perpetrators or victims, we will now turn to an analysis of how the patterns of sexual violence in Colombia can be understood in interaction with the theoretical framework. The following chapter will present an analysis of how the patterns may be conceptualized, through a look at their functions and meanings.

6 PATTERNS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

As was made clear through the discussion in chapter 5, it is not feasible to speak of one pattern, one set of motivations, or one set of purposes for the perpetration of sexual violence in the conflict in Colombia. This finding links back to Leiby's (2009) claim, as referenced in chapter 3, that "*sexual violence will serve no **single** purpose during war*" (p. 447). The armed groups differ from each other along meaningful determinants, and so does the victims. At the same time, however, none of these groups are static actors, but rather evolve alongside a changing conflict dynamics. Additionally, as the dynamics of the conflict changes temporally and geographically, different contexts in which wartime sexual violence is perpetrated also emerge. As a result of this combination of factors, the conflict exposes varied patterns of wartime sexual violence. Sometimes these patterns make part of an instrumental intention, other times they are better understood within a non-instrumental framework.

One central pattern to be studied is arguably the *function* of the act of sexual violence. Accepting, as Kirby (2013) suggests that the *results* or *effects* of sexual violence may also be understood as consequences, rather than instrumental causes (p. 810), I am hesitant to speak of the *purpose* of an act. Rather the focus is on the act's *function* as this enable us to comprehend that even similar acts of wartime sexual violence can at times have an instrumental purpose, but at other times have effects which were not purposefully intended before acting, but which occurred to have a function or to serve as a benefit for the perpetrator or his/her group in the aftermath of the act. This also enables us to account for the opportunity that sexual violence might not, as Baaz and Stern (2013) point out, always be the result of a clear strategy implemented down the chain of command, but might also represent the lack of control in combination with processes at the micro-level of violence (p. 5).

Before we turn to the discussion of the functions of sexual violence, however, one important aspect of analyzing patterns must be addressed. When we theorize about patterns in political science, a significant pretext is often to be able to say something about relative frequency. This proves to be true also in much theorizing on wartime

sexual violence, including qualitative accounts. For example, in her theorizing Wood (2009) poses the question “When is wartime rape rare?”, clearly suggesting that a pattern should be deducted, in part, based on relative frequency. “Rare” or “frequent”, become patterns we can deduct and explore, but this must then be guided by a quantitative assessment of relative frequency. When it comes to patterns of wartime sexual violence, however, quantifying the problem can be challenging, and even more so when it is question of sexual violence in a conflict still ongoing. Attempting to quantify based on limited data may lead to false inferences. Furthermore, the relative frequency of an act does not necessarily tell us anything about its qualitative patterns. As discussed in chapter 3, high frequency of wartime sexual violence does not necessarily reflect a specific meaning or function of the act, in other words high frequency alone does not tell us whether an act is strategic or not, or if it has other meanings.

Based on this, I thus argue, that patterns can also be assessed qualitatively. By focusing on the three central aspects which were introduced in chapter 5: the act’s perpetrator, the act’s victim, and the context in which the act takes place, we can identify patterns pertaining to the phenomenon’s different functions, hereunder purposes and meanings. This analysis is done in line with Leiby who argues: “*Without interviewing the perpetrators themselves, it is difficult to assess individual motives. However, by analyzing overall patterns of how sexual violence is used, we can begin to unravel the collective interests or motives*” (Leiby, 2009, p. 460).

The analysis presented in this chapter is divided in two main parts. In the first section, the functions of wartime sexual violence in Colombia will be discussed in dialogue with the theoretical framework. During the analysis, the five contexts presented in chapter 5, were found to represent three main functions of wartime sexual violence: to extract information and intelligence; to secure and exert territorial control; and to control armed group behavior.

In the second part of this chapter, the analytical categories will be discussed with a special focus on whether acts of sexual violence in the conflict in Colombia may be

said to be strategic or not, hereunder which problems may arise if we insist on framing sexual violence within this narrative only.

6.1 Functions of wartime sexual violence

6.1.1 Extracting information and intelligence

The term extracting information and intelligence, refers in this context to the retrieval of information in order to give early warning of counter attacks, movements of enemies and local knowledge of one area. This is done through the use of torture such as sexual violence, predominately against victims in captivity or detention, or through deceiving people into having romantic affairs and building trust with the aim of extracting intelligence. Whereas the former predominately targets armed actors or collaborators, the latter targets civilians residing in areas under an armed group's control.

Leiby (2009) asserts that one of the characteristics of sexual violence aimed at collecting intelligence is that it generally is “more controlled and organized”, for instance in terms of the identity of the victim, than sexual violence with other purposes (Leiby, 2009, p. 450). Since the information that potential victims hold is central, indiscriminate violence is unlikely. This is arguably true for the contexts outlined above, but at the same time one can differentiate within this category between instances of selective violence and instances of collective violence³⁶.

In the context of detention and captivity, the victims are often armed actors, or individuals categorized as sympathizers, predominantly with guerilla groups. The perpetrators are either state actors in detention centers, or illegal armed actors, when the victim is held in captivity by these groups. The sexual violence perpetrated often forms part of a comprehensive torture regime. As outlined in the preceding chapter,

³⁶ Collective violence targets specific social groups, such as inhabitants of specific regions or communities, or members of political groups, whereas selective violence targets individuals as revenge or punishment (Wood, 2011)

victims in captivity with illegal armed groups are also often killed in the aftermath of these interrogations.

This evidence suggests that the violence is selective in the sense that victims are targeted due to specific information that they are believed to hold. At the same time, however, violence in this context also has a collective aspect to it: Victims are targeted because of their perceived belonging to a specific political group. Accepting this collective aspect also opens up the possibility to understand the act of sexual violence outside the pure instrumental analytical category. Below I will explain why.

Leiby (2009) asserts that wartime sexual violence perpetrated against victims in detention should be understood as strategic, given that it is impossible for sexual assaults to take place in the controlled environment that a detention center represents, without the knowledge and explicit or implicit consent of commanding officers. One can argue that the same is true when victims are held as captives of illegal armed groups in their camps or on their premises. I concur with Leiby in this reasoning, but at the same time it leaves out central aspects which I see as important in order to fully comprehend the complex phenomenon. First of all, this reasoning does not enable us to distinguish between whether acts are ordered or accepted. If the act is accepted, but not explicitly ordered, this implies that a more complex motive than a simple instrumental one initiates the act. In other words, if an act *is* ordered the perpetrator can be rationalized as an instrumental actor following orders that he or she has been trained or socialized to obey. If, on the other hand, the act is *not* ordered, it may represent a tactic³⁷ on behalf of individual actors or individual units, but it may also at the same time reflect a collective targeting of the group to which the victim belongs.

The collective targeting can be motivated by the victim's political identity. For instance, armed actors may be socialized into accepting that certain groups can be targeted with more brutal violence than others, following a socialization process which involves a combination of desensitization of combatants and de-humanization of victims or opponents (Wood, 2011). A prominent example from the Colombian

³⁷ "A short-term policy related to a particular circumstance" (Kirby, 2013, p. 808).

context is the stereotyping of *guerilleras* which has been a documented part of training and socialization, both among paramilitary combatants and among sections of the armed forces. Framed within this process, the perpetration of sexualized torture can also be understood as means to humiliate or feminize a perceived enemy. The instrumental function of the act – to retrieve information – could arguably have been achieved through other means, but the collective targeting of the enemy makes sexual violence an accepted practice.

Furthermore, the victim may also be targeted collectively due to her gender. This links back to the discussion of war as gendered in which military operations and armed actors are understood as ‘masculine’. In a report on the situation for female political prisoners in Colombia, predominately combatants from the insurgency, a working group argued that women in detention in state prisons experience a two-folded punishment, first, as their male companions, for breaking the law, and second for breaking with traditional gender roles, and for participating in activities which generally are reserved for men, such as politics and the armed conflict (Mesa de Trabajo Mujer y Conflicto Armado, 2010, p. 51). The group further argues that the authorities are looking to control, not only the lives of these women, but also their bodies and sexuality (Mesa de Trabajo Mujer y Conflicto Armado, 2010, p. 52). If we link this general assessment of the treatment of political prisoners, to the perpetration of sexual violence in detention, it may also be perceived that victims may be targeted as soldiers “*are answering the call to fulfill ideal types of military masculinity, and in so doing are adhering to established norms*” (Baaz & Stern, 2013, p. 27) . It appears as if male and female combatants are treated differently in Colombian society post-demobilization due to established norms of gender roles. When speaking of their own experience of demobilization, two of the ex-combatants interviewed differentiated how men and women were treated in the following manner: “*They were the heroes, we were the sluts!*” (Ex-combatants II & III, personal interview, 31.01.14).

In all the examples of collective targeting that have been discussed in this section, the function of the perpetration of sexual violence may still be the extraction of information or intelligence. However, this function – the consequence of the act - may

not necessarily have served as the isolated motive for acting. This does not mean that the act does not have a political meaning, nor should it be separated from our conceptualization of warfare. Perpetration of sexual violence may still be instrumental in some circumstances, but our understanding of it should not be limited to this category only.

6.1.2 Securing and exerting territorial dominance

Control over territories has been a central question throughout Colombia's history of conflict, and it continues to be an important motivational factor and ultimate goal for the perpetration of violence in general. How we see the relationship between sexual violence and the exertion of territorial dominance depends on how we conceptualize about territorial control. Territorial control might be understood, along the veins of traditional military theory, as the *control of land*. It might also be understood as the *control of people*, or we might conceptualize it as *the control of norms and culture*. In this thesis, I will look at all three forms. Since this specific function arguably pertains to such a significant part of the ultimate goal of warfare in Colombia, it also involves a number of different contexts and perpetrators. The victims are often, though not exclusively, civilians residing in affected areas.

If territorial dominance is conceptualized within a limited understanding of this concept, meaning *the control of land*, sexual violence has served different purposes. First of all, it has functioned to create a sense of terror among inhabitants in areas that have had economic or strategic importance to the armed actors, which in turn have forced people to flee their homes or to live in constant terror. This is true both when sexual violence is used in the context of incursion, for instance during massacres, and also when it is perpetrated after the initial incursion to perpetuate the sense of terror, as was discussed in context 2 in the previous chapter. As outlined in chapter 5, many individuals and families have fled their homes following the victimization or threat of widespread violence, including sexual violence. Sexual violence is not necessarily *alone* causing displacement, as a wide repertoire of violence have been employed to secure the direct domination of *land*, but the empirical material shows that threats or

actual perpetration of sexual violence have preceded massive internal displacement, not least of female-led households.

When sexual violence is perpetrated in a manner that leads to internal displacement, it is a clear example of collective violence, according to Wood's (2011) categorization. It is collective in the sense that it targets victims because they are residing in an area which has strategic importance for the armed group. Furthermore, it is also collective in the sense that each act of violence often appears to function as violence against the local community at large. It is, in other words not only affecting the targeted individual or the targeted family, but often the entire community, by causing terror and fear in the entire group. Nevertheless, the function of the sexual violence when it is understood within this mode, may be deducted to have an instrumental component, as its end-goal is clear.

The problem with understanding wartime sexual violence solely within this mode, however, is that it represents a reductionist understanding of what territorial dominance entail. As exemplified in the previous chapter, the territorial dominance exerted in the conflict in Colombia does not simply pertain to the control of land in a simplistic understanding of the term, in other words to control land in order to freely move troops and goods through that area. Exerting territorial dominance also refers to a domination of the inhabitants of that land, who then become the subjects of the armed group in control. In other words, not only the land they inhabit, but also the personal liberty of these individuals becomes a subject for domination by the armed group. One example of this, as outlined in chapter 5, is when combatants from insurgent groups take local women as wives or mistresses, in order to create bonds of trust with their families. Another example is the rather widespread practice in Colombia of hurting the enemy through punishing its perceived sympathizers. As discussed in chapter 5 the definition of who are considered sympathizers are usually wide, often including all individuals who have resided in an area dominated by an opposing group.

All the armed actors in Colombia have to some extent targeted the enemy following this logic. Such attacks have at times involved sexual violence, predominately when committed by the paramilitary structures or the army. Insurgents, including paramilitary and leftist groups have expressed that civilians are targeted because they are considered military targets. For the army, such targeting have often happened as part of counter-insurgency operations, in which the illegal armed groups have been treated as terrorist organizations, and in which the *modus operandi* is the “war on terror”, which does not necessarily pertain to regular rules for warfare. As argued by Leiby (2009), armed forces are often unable or also unwilling to distinguish between actual insurgents and the civil population in these situations. This lack of differentiation may also have a function in and of itself, in terms of limiting the future recruit base for insurgent groups in the area and creating a general sense of terror among potential future recruits (Leiby, 2009). This clearly links back to the understanding of warfare which was outlined in chapter 3.1.2, in which it was discussed how the frontlines of current conflicts are unclear, due to a merging of civilian and military life (See for instance Kaldor, 2007; Skjelsbaek, 2011). This merging is clearly visible in the conflict in Colombia, in which an individual or a group’s geographical position to a large degree decides which identities and which alleged sympathies are ascribed to it.

What has become evident, however, is that victims are not necessarily targeted only to affect themselves, but also to affect a larger segment to which this individual belong. For instance there are examples of the targeting of women, which has functioned as an indirect targeting of men. My informant from the organization ILSA explained this in the following manner: *“In this conflict in Colombia a lot of the cases of sexual violence are due to women falling in love with the enemy. It is a battle for who has dominance over that territory”* (ILSA staff, personal interview, 29.01.14). When asked about this issue in interviews, four of my informants linked it to traditional gender roles, in which men function as ‘protectors’ (IMP staff, personal interview, 28.01.14; ILSA staff, personal interview, 29.01.14; Ex-combatants II & III, personal interview, 31.01.14). This clearly links up to questions of masculinity and femininity

in war, as discussed in chapter 3, where a part of the masculine identity is associated with categories such as strong, aggressive and protective, whereas the woman is perceived as peaceful and in need of protection (Categories based on the work of Baaz & Stern, 2013) . In this context, sexual violence then functions not only to mark territory, but also to humiliate or feminize the enemy: “*..to give a lesson, to give a lesson to the women, but also to give a lesson to the male (..) to defy their honor*” (Ex-combatant III, personal interview, 31.01.14). The informant from ILSA further asserted: “*The conflicts where you are fighting over territory, women’s bodies are one of the territories you are fighting over*” (ILSA staff, personal interview, 29.01.14).

The conceptualization of women’s bodies as “territories” which may be dominated, also links to the discussion which was opened in chapter 3, on the brutality with which women’s bodies are targeted during war. Seifert (1996) explained this as an expression of “*hatred for femininity as such*” (p. 38), but also a way of hurting “the nation” through targeting its reproducers, whereas Leiby (2009) saw it as a means for affecting entire communities with violence, as the terror and its effects is targeted at communities or groups of individuals, not only the actual victim. As we saw in chapter 5, there are testimonies in Colombia of males being targeted with this particularly brutal violence along the same pattern as its female victims. The brutality of the acts can hence not be written off as “hatred for femininity as such”, but appears to function as a means to demonstrate power and create a sense of terror in the affected community at large. In this sense the entire community is ‘feminized’ and humiliated, and a clear message is being portrayed to the subjects, i.e. the people under an armed group’s control, that their personal liberty to sympathize as they please is limited. Still, however, the exertion of territorial control through the domination of land and through the domination of people as discussed above, has clear military purposes. It is ultimately a question of controlling strategic land and of limiting your enemies support and recruit base. There is, however, also a third mode for considering territorial control.

Domination of territories might not solely refer to the actual domination of land and people, but also to the domination of culture and norms. As discussed in chapter 3,

Seifert (1996) asserts that one of the central aims of warfare is defeating the enemy's culture and self-image. Setting normative standards, regulating civil life, and by that limiting personal liberty is hence a way of dominating a territory. As outlined in chapter 5, both paramilitary groups and guerilla groups have targeted individuals perceived to be outside what is broadly considered "normal" or accepted behavior, and at times functioned as a "state-like" actor in the areas they control (Amnesty International, 2004). The unwanted behavior has often been punished through violent means, including sexual violence, and usually in complete impunity (Amnesty International, 2004).

There is a wider documentation base of the paramilitaries' perpetration of sexual violence in this context, compared to other armed groups, and it often seems to be directed towards breaches of conservative values, taking the form of social control or even 'social cleansing' as discussed in chapter 5. Amnesty International suggest that in the case of the paramilitaries, this is a tactic aimed at gaining legitimacy among the population at large, because it builds on already existing sentiments and prejudices in the population (Amnesty International, 2004, p. 11). Paradoxically enough, sexual violence may in these cases function to *increase* legitimacy of the group, even though it is in other circumstances used for the opposite – to create fear and a sense of terror among inhabitants in the area that the group controls. This example clearly illustrates the complexity of the phenomenon of wartime sexual violence. What it also serves to demonstrate, however, is that norms and culture represents entities which may be under the control of armed groups in a conflict situation.

Finally, I also argue that sexual slavery and forced prostitution could represent a function of territorial control. This is arguably, however, a clear example of sexual violence committed in the context of conflict, which does not have a clear instrumental function during warfare. As outlined in chapter 5, forced prostitution or sexual slavery organized by the armed groups is made possible due to a group's control of a given area, from which women already working as prostitutes, or young girls, are forced or enticed into sexual slavery. This pattern of sexual violence is not, however, found in all regions of the conflict, but seem to be limited to some areas and some commanders.

In the words of Kirby (2013), it is an example of the “*merging of private desires and public events*” (p.809). The intentions and motivations might simply be the economic or sexual desires of individual commanders or units, but the function might still be to manifest territorial control and to create a sense of terror.

What this section has highlighted is that territorial control might have different purposes depending on how we conceptualize about it. Within each conceptualization – the domination of land, the domination of people, and the domination of norms and culture – the perpetration of sexual violence may also be understood differently. What this section hence has illustrated is that understanding territorial control solely as the domination of land does not enable us to comprehend the full picture of the sexual violence perpetrated for this function.

6.1.3 Controlling armed group behavior

As outlined in the preceding chapter, sexual violence is used within ranks primarily in the form of the forced use of contraception and forced abortions. The guerilla groups appear to be the main perpetrators of this type of violence, but the extent of the issue is unclear due to the problems of data collection which was outlined in chapters 2 and 5. The function of this type of sexual violence appears to diverge from the other two functions outlined above due to one factor in particular: The victims are no longer actors external to the group, but rather individuals within their own ranks. The function of the acts hence appears to be to control armed group behavior.

One could argue that such targeting has a rather clear instrumental function. It happens in a controlled surrounding with the consent of commanding officers. Testimonies collected by Human Rights Watch (2003) even suggest that the act is often perpetrated by nurses or other health care personal affiliated with the armed groups. Its function appears to be to control all aspects of combatant’s behavior, including their reproductive ability in order to ensure group efficiency. In this sense it fulfills criteria outlined by both Wood (2012) and Leiby (2009) for categorizing an act of sexual violence as a war strategy, as was discussed in chapter 3. One of my informants

explained the phenomenon referring to the “war dynamics”, or the “nature of war”, saying that: *“Practically, the war dynamics or the war logic makes you do that, because you can’t bear child or you can’t really have a child with you during the war”* (Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14).

One can also find examples, however, of reports linking this function of sexual violence more closely to the other two functions which has been discussed. To do this involves accepting that all three functions have a common, over-arching goal. Amnesty International has identified this goal to be controlling women’s role as the “reproducer of the nation”:

“Women are at risk not only as individuals but as members of social groups – sometimes their sexuality or reproductive capacity is attacked because they are indigenous or Afro-descendant women or from other marginalized communities. At other times they may be controlled by their ‘own’ side. In each case the motive is the same, to control women as reproducers of the nation, community or social group” (Amnesty International, 2004, p. 11).

There is, however, some reason to question whether this reasoning holds in the cases where sexual violence is targeted at individuals within a group’s own ranks. It appears difficult to imagine a situation where it is in an armed group’s interest to target its own female cadre with the intention of limiting their ability to reproduce the ‘nation, community or social group’, as the community or social group that these women belong to often represent the recruit base for the armed group in question. Arguably, this argument falls on its own weight, as it implies a situation in which an armed group essentially is seeking to limit its own access to recruits. Rather, what this example could illustrate is the importance of keeping complex concepts apart when discussing wartime sexual violence. Based on the evidence presented, it appears as more likely that that the reproductive control serves a function more closely connected to the statement from the *Corporación Humanas* staff presented above: The war dynamics limits the identities an individual can take on.

This links up to an understanding of the military as a masculine entity where both men and women who join are socialized into a warring identity which is founded in an ideal type of military masculinity, as discussed in chapter 3. Within this identity there is arguably no room for the typical feminine characteristics, as outlined by Baaz and Stern (2013), such as a nurturing function. Arguing that accounting for motherhood is essential when analyzing female agency in political violence, Åhäll (2012) asserts that this represent a conflict between two identities: the life-giving and the life-taking (p. 299). Precisely this tension, rather than a wider motivation of controlling the reproductive capabilities of a community or a nation, can be understood as a central underlying factor linked to reproductive control within ranks.

Amnesty International continues to argue in their report that: “*Women’s ability to reproduce also means that their bodies have become a battleground in which the most brutal violence is committed*” (Amnesty International, 2004, p. 11). This statement arguably relates to both trajectories outlined above. The fact that women are targeted due to their reproductive ability does not, however, automatically reflect that they are targeted for being “reproducers of the nation, community or social group”. Rather it appears more plausible that the targeting outlined in this section is linked to a streamlining of armed units which fits into a masculine combatant identity.

Having discussed the different functions of wartime sexual violence in Colombia, we will now move to a discussion of the degree to which these functions constitutes strategic acts. Whereas the first section of this chapter categorized the functions of wartime sexual violence into ideal categories which enables us to analyze and make sense of the available material, the latter section of the chapter will move further into the complexity of the phenomenon of wartime sexual violence through problematizing some central aspects of its conceptualization.

6.2 When is Sexual Violence a Strategy?

How to deduce when acts are strategic and not is one of the most central questions in current literature on wartime sexual violence. Whereas traditional understandings of

the concept involved seeing sexual violence as some kind of a “bi-product” of conflict, the last couple of decades have seen a shift towards increasingly talking about sexual violence as strategic. As outlined in this thesis, the dominant narrative of ‘sexual violence in war’ in Colombia is that of the “widespread and strategic weapon of war”. At the same time, and as could be seen from the discussion of functions above, it is difficult to deduct based on the available empirical material, whether and in which contexts, the sexual violence committed in the conflict in Colombia makes part of coherent war strategies. Indeed, the empirical material presented very conflicting perspectives when it came to this question. For instance, the human rights organization *Corporación Humanas* argued that the brunt of sexual violence in the conflict in Colombia is ordered (Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14). In particular they believed this to be true in the cases where sexual violence was used to dominate territory (Corporación Humanas staff, personal interview, 16.01.14). Presenting the opposite picture, commanders within the paramilitary groups that were interrogated after demobilization have asserted that any sexual abuse committed by paramilitary combatants happened “*due to lack of control of the troop*” (Alianza Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz - IMP et al., 2013, p. 8). Furthermore, based on work with members of demobilized armed groups, a staff member at the DDR-team at Mapp/OEA also asserted that an order structure for the perpetration of sexual violence could not be identified for any of the paramilitary groups which demobilized between 2003 and 2006 (Private conversation, 24.01.14). These conflicting perspectives clearly illustrate the problems with identifying when sexual violence is used strategically in the conflict in Colombia, and when it should be understood within a different framework.

In traditional military studies, a war strategy is defined as a *way* in which available *means* (usually weapons, conventional or unconventional) are used in order to achieve a certain *end* (Betts, 2000, p. 5). Employing this framework in its purest form when conceptualizing about wartime sexual violence, involves ascribing an “*intentional component*” to the act, in which actors are perceived as rationally deciding to commit sexual abuse in order to achieve an identified end (Kirby, 2013, p. 807). This clearly

represents a simplistic way of looking at usually complex and chaotic warfare situations. Due to this issue, in combination with the problem of documenting actual orders of sexual violence, the understanding of what constitutes a strategy is wider in much theorizing about wartime sexual violence, as was outlined in chapter 3.2.1. Scholars such as Wood (2011) and Leiby (2009) argue that the direct or indirect consent to the perpetration of sexual violence from commanding officers, is sufficient to categorize these atrocities as strategic. This consent is deducted based on assessments of different aspects of the armed groups under scrutiny, such as group organization and hierarchical strengths. What the analysis of functions of sexual violence in the conflict in Colombia has illustrated, however, is how the identity of victims and the contexts in which the violence take place, also is important in order to comprehend the functions and consequences of these atrocities. Even strategic uses of sexual violence can have different patterns depending on whether sexual violence is perpetrated as an essential means for a strategy, or as a more peripheral means, which is not pivotal for the strategy, but which still is committed (Kirby, 2013, p. 800). If one accepts that sexual violence is employed strategically in the conflict in Colombia, it could still appear as if some of the sexual violence committed is either so brutal and chaotic³⁸, or on the other hand so closely connected to the practices of more or less autonomous commanders³⁹ that one could question whether it represents an excessive use of means to achieve an end.

As the discussion of the different functions of wartime sexual violence in Colombia illustrated, it was possible to deduct clear patterns of perpetration, leading to atrocities with social, political and military consequences. The material did not allow us to conclude whether sexual violence is part of a conscious leadership strategy, whether it is initiated ad hoc, as part of a contemporary tactic, whether it is motivated by sexual desires, or whether it usually represents a combination of the three. It is important to emphasize, however, that these instances of sexual violence which might represent strategic acts, either way are political acts connected to warfare, which should be

³⁸ For instance, during massacres

³⁹ Such as the taking of young girls as wives and mistresses

understood and analyzed within this context. Wartime sexual violence imposes immense trauma on its victims and their communities, and an increased understanding of the phenomenon is therefore pivotal.

7 CONCLUSION

Recent literature has repeatedly warned against mono-causal explanations of wartime sexual violence (See for instance Boesten, 2010; Kirby, 2013; Leiby, 2009). A central task for researchers has hence become to map out varying patterns of this phenomenon, be it between conflicts, within one conflict over time, or between different armed actors within the same conflict. Variation in this context might refer to a difference in frequency of perpetration, but since the frequency of an act cannot necessarily tell us anything about its motivation and effect, understanding the variation of motives, purposes, and functions of wartime sexual violence is also important. Attempting to contribute to the emerging literature on how patterns of wartime sexual violence vary within armed conflicts, this thesis addressed the following research questions:

What are the main patterns of wartime sexual violence in the conflict in Colombia, and why are the actors opting for this type of violence? Which perspectives emerge from the available empirical material?

Colombia's patterns of wartime sexual violence were mapped out by focusing on three main factors: the contexts in which sexual violence is perpetrated in the conflict; the perpetrators of this violence; and its victims. Five contexts in which sexual violence have been perpetrated were identified from the empirical material: During incursions; during the exertion of territorial control; within ranks in the armed groups; in detention or captivity; and finally, through sexual slavery enabled by the conflict. Based on this, sexual violence was found to have three main functions: to collect information and intelligence, to secure and exert territorial control, and to control armed group behavior. The term 'functions' was found to be most suitable to describe the latter categories, as this enables us to comprehend that the effect of wartime sexual violence may be a consequence rather than the purpose of an act.

Varying, and at times conflicting perspectives on the meanings and motives of wartime sexual violence emerged from the empirical material. There is not one clear

‘explanation’ or cause of the perpetration and victimization of sexual violence in connection with warfare, and multiple factors such as the interests, goals and ideas of the armed actors, the different identities held and prescribed to victims, and varying contexts, including a developing conflict dynamics, must all be taken into account when attempt to conceptualize about this complex phenomenon. What appears clear based on the analysis presented in this thesis is that a pure instrumental understanding of sexual violence in war does not necessarily reflect its different faces. Framing sexual violence only within the ‘strategy’ or ‘weapon of war’ paradigms, may hence result in a simplistic and limiting analysis. In this regard, this thesis is hence intended as a contribution to the ongoing “strategy debate” within the literature, by arguing that sexual violence serve different functions and have different meanings, decided by a complex network of influencing factors, as discussed in the preceding chapters.

It is important to emphasize that this does not mean that sexual violence does *not* function as a brutal weapon in war. It most definitely represents a damaging weapon in war, which by some armed actors and in some contexts is used intentionally and as a strategy to achieve political and military goals. This is not, however, the only face of wartime sexual violence. Furthermore, and as outlined in the analysis, sexual violence can represent a strategy, without necessarily fitting neatly into the ‘weapon of war’ framework. This thesis argued that this is the case when sexual violence is perpetrated against victims internally in an armed group to control armed group behavior.

Nevertheless, wartime sexual violence, whether forming part of a strategy or not, inflicts immense trauma, not only on the affected individuals, but also on entire groups and communities, and it is therefore important to understand its varying functions and motivations.

Both the contexts and the functions mapped out in this thesis are clearly ideal categories, which at times may overlap, but they were still found to be useful analytical tools in the attempt to map out patterns. It is, however, important to emphasize the nuance that exists within the material. As discussed in the analysis, the clear trajectories for analyzing wartime sexual violence based on a study predominately focusing on the armed actors, as has been outlined by among others

Wood (2008, 2009, 2011, 2012) and Leiby (2009, 2012) could not easily be identified in the Colombian context. The lengthy conflict, which has existed for approximately five decades, has seen changing conflict dynamics, in which the involved groups have evolved accordingly, and in which the merging of private and public zones, not least when it comes to the perpetration of violence, has been prominent. The conflict, and the violence perpetrated within it, exists in a context which takes part in shaping its dynamics and patterns.

7.1 Suggestions for further research

Increasing the understanding of sexual violence at the micro-level is an ongoing task for scholars. Colombia represents an interesting case in this regards, because it enables us to compare and contrast a number of armed groups both temporally, spatially, and between different factions within the same groups. Since the Colombian conflict has illegal actors from the leftist and rightwing side of the political spectrum, in addition to a legal armed actor, it makes an interesting case for studying variation at the armed group level. A possible focus for future investigations, with a wider time span for data collection than what the framework of this thesis allowed, could be to negotiate further access to demobilized combatants from different armed groups in Colombia to attain deeper insight into motivations and justifications on behalf of the different armed actors. Whereas this thesis has mapped out that there are different patterns of perpetration of sexual violence in the conflict, a collection of more first-hand accounts would be valuable to attain an increased understanding of the motivations and justifications leading up to the perpetration of sexual violence. Furthermore, the Colombian government and FARC are currently in peace negotiations. If and when a peace agreement is in place, investigations of human rights abuses and the potential for a truth commission can open the possibility of more material becoming available for researchers and the public.

Furthermore, Colombia represents an interesting case for comparing and contrasting different types of armed actors, as well as different groups of victims. The SVAC⁴⁰ dataset claims that state armed actors more often perpetrate sexual violence than other armed groups (Cohen & Nordås, 2014, p. 425). Similar sentiments emerged during my interviews in Bogotá, but could not be confirmed from the available material. Further investigation into this could be interesting. Another call within the literature is also for increased focus on male victims of wartime sexual violence (See for instance Skjelsbaek, 2011, pp. 81-82). Even though the existing documentation on sexual violence in Colombia continues to pertain to existing gender stereotypes framing women as victims and men as perpetrators, there are emerging reports on male victimization, which can be explored further.

Finally, what also becomes clear from studies like this and others looking at the variation of sexual violence in war, is that there clearly is no “one-size fits all” remedy for these atrocities. Further research is needed to map out how the different faces of wartime sexual violence can be prevented and mitigated.

⁴⁰ Sexual Violence in Armed Conflicts

Fieldwork References

List of Interviews/Conversations:

Corporacion Humanas, Staff member. *Local NGO working mainly with gender issues from a perspective derived from international human rights. The organization was founded by a group of academics who through publication of several reports which document the use of sexual violence in the conflict, have established themselves as among the most central knowledge producers on wartime sexual violence in Colombia.* Personal interview with translator in Bogotá 2014-01-16. Translator: Marcela Del Portillo Cure

Ex-Combatant 1, *Female ex-combatant from M-19 who was a member until demobilization in 1990. Was also part of FARC for a few months in 1990.* Personal interview with translator in Bogotá 2014-01-21. Translator: Marcela Del Portillo Cure

Ex-Combatants II & III. *Female ex-combatants from M-19, who were members until demobilization in 1990.* Personal interview with translator in Bogotá 2014-01-31. Translator: Marcela Del Portillo Cure

Geneva Call, National Coordinator. *International human rights NGO which dialogues with the armed groups through conversations/interviews with individuals who are currently imprisoned, in an attempt to promote respect for human rights among non-state armed actors. Because this organization works directly with the illegal armed actors in Colombia, they were open about their stance not to denounce any type of acts, including sexual violence, because this would function to cut their stream of communication.* Personal interview with translator in Bogotá 2014-01-17. Translator: Marcela Del Portillo Cure

ILSA - Instituto Latinoamericano para una Sociedad y un Derecho alternativos [The Latin-American Institute for an Alternative Society and Alternative Law]. Coordinator. *Local NGO promoting human and women's rights with a particular focus on legal and judicial issues. The informant had also been involved in a working group [Mesa de Trabajo] which has produced a number of reports on the situation of women in the conflict in Colombia.* Personal interview with translator in Bogotá 2014-01-29. Translator: Marcela Del Portillo Cure

IMP – Iniciativo de Mujeres por la Paz [The Initiative Women for Peace], Local staff member. *Local NGO working with gender issues, including sexual violence.*

The organization was established in cooperation with Swedish women's organizations and with support from SIDA, and it works with female participation in peace building and in politics in general, as well as focusing on reducing the impact of armed conflict on women, including conflict-related sexual violence. Personal interview with translator in Bogotá 2014-01-28. Translator: Marcela Del Portillo Cure

Mapp-OEA - Misión de Apoyo al Proceso de Paz en Colombia [Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia from the Organization of American States], Staff of DDR-team. *Mission from the Organization of American States which is working to support Colombia in its endeavors to reach a peace agreement, as well as with its DDR-program. The DDR-team runs programs for, and collects information from, demobilized combatants from all illegal armed groups, but with particular focus on the former AUC. Personal conversation in Bogotá 2014-01-24.*

Norwegian Caritas. Staff Member. *Norwegian humanitarian organization which runs programs in Colombia promoting peace building and local development. Personal interview in Bogotá 2014-01-13.*

Oxfam International. Coordinator/Researcher. *Oxfam International is an international NGO which works with several topics related to human rights and development. In Colombia, Oxfam is involved in the "Rights in Crisis"-program which among other things runs the campaign 'Leave My Body out of War' which focuses on the mitigating of wartime sexual violence. The organization also works with women's rights in general. Personal interview in Bogotá 2014-01-30.*

UN-Women. Communications Officer. *The UN Women is the United Nation's organization for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. In Colombia, the UN Women has projects related to wartime sexual violence, including documentation of its prevalence and support programs for victims. Personal interview with translator in Bogotá 2014-01-22. Translator: Marcela Del Portillo Cure*

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